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A STUDY OF THE PERSONALITY OF FRANZ LISZT
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CONTRADICTIONS
IN HIS NATURE

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Chapter I

BACKGROUND

"The man who appears unable to find peace ...
there can be no doubt ... that we have here
to deal with the extraordinary, multiply-moved
mind as well as with a mind influencing others.
His own life is to be found in his music."

(Robert Schumann 19.4)

Even the birth of Franz Liszt was one of duality - he was a child of the borderline between Austria and Hungary. His birthplace, even though near Vienna, was on the confines of the civilized world and not far removed from the dominions of the Turk. Indeed, the Turks had receded from there. The Hungarian lived in feudal peace on the very edges of modern society.

The village of Raiding, near Sopron, where he was born on October 22, 1811, son of Adam and Anna Liszt, was at that time situated in the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy.⁽¹⁾ These historical vicissitudes are today reflected in the exterior of the house in which he was born; a house with two entrances. Over the right-hand entrance is a plaque with a dedication in Hungarian from the citizens of Sopron; over the left-hand entrance is a second plaque with an inscription in German "from the German people to the great German master". (28.19) This is strangely reflective of the conflicts that were to rage within Liszt from the time he became aware of his potential as a musician until the day of his death!

His mother-tongue was German. Anna Maria Lager, the mother to whom he was devoted, was daughter of a master baker of the Austrian

(1) Since 1920 Raiding has been part of the province of Burgenland, incorporated into the Austrian Republic in 1921.

town of Krems. (But his great-grandfather on his father's side died at Ragendorf in Western Hungary.) His father, Adam, born in Burgenland, was a schoolmaster and organist. At the time of Franz's birth, Adam was in the employ of Prince Esterhazy. He was a good performer on piano, violin, 'cello and guitar and could also sing and compose. On the night of Franz's birth, it is claimed that the brilliant comet which had dominated the skies of Europe since August, glowed with such intensity that night was almost turned into day. (27.15)

In Raiding music was a great stand-by, as it was a quiet little village where entertainment was self-made. In the Liszt household there was much chamber-music and the young Liszt grew up in an intensely musical environment.

Visits to Eisenstadt provided the Liszt seniors with more sophisticated musical entertainment, while at Raiding itself, shepherds played pipes and violins and there was the music of the Tziganes. Liszt junior left Hungary in his 10th year and did not return until he was 30, yet his early environment made a profound impression on him - the impetuosity, fire and brilliance of his early surroundings were stamped upon his memory.

The glitter and gilt of Eisenstadt should not, however, be exaggerated, for it had its 'seamier' side. There were the ragged gypsies, while the landscape outside Eisenstadt and Esterhazy was itself monotonous - endlessly plain, low-lying, marshy. The main source of colour was to be found in the clothes of the people, music of the gypsies and in church ceremonies.

Liszt's early environment was to have a lasting effect on him, despite the fact that he spent most of his adult life living in Paris and Weimar. If not a real Magyar, he was a marvellous facsimile - both his advantage and his undoing, for many of the characteristics for which he was later damned in Europe would have passed unnoticed in his native land; e.g. his passion for women and his great conceit. Many authorities have quoted vanity as being the major obstacle to Magyar progress. Liszt's critics constantly accuse him of being overdressed, over-sexed and incredibly vain - all true, but just

as true of other nations such as the Poles and Sicilians. (19.11)
Alan Walker sums up the influence of Liszt's birthplace upon him
when he says:

"In everything he was rare and phenomenal and
showed the strange surroundings, the charged
atmosphere in which he was bred." (27.77)

At a child, Liszt was very delicate and seems also to have been
prone to cataleptic seizures, which were worrying for his parents,
who became highly protective towards him. His genius showed itself
at an early age. He could improvise long before he could read
a note. His family was too poor to further his musical education
themselves and tried to get a sponsor for Liszt by having him give
concerts to display his talent. One such concert was at Eisenstadt
at the court of Prince Nicholas Esterhazy. Some noblemen agreed
to finance lessons for the boy for the next six years to enable
him to study abroad. A story emanating from Liszt is that when
playing for Beethoven at a concert given at Beethoven's house, the
great master was so moved that he kissed Liszt on the forehead.
(27.20)

In 1821 the Liszt family moved to Vienna. Czerny was the boy's
first teacher after his father. After criticizing the careless
teaching Liszt had thus far had, he said:-

"Nevertheless, I was amazed by the talent with
which nature had equipped him. I gave him
a few things to sight-read, which he did, purely
by instinct, but for that very reason in a manner
which revealed that nature herself had here
created a pianist ... never before had I so
eager, talented or industrious a student." (19.14)

Because of Liszt's outstanding talent and the family's straitened
circumstances, he agreed to give the child instructions for 18 months
free of charge.

The family moved to Paris in 1823. With the boy's increasing fame,
they were moving in a higher social circle, but Anna could not adapt
to their new circumstances. She was sensitively aware of being
out of her station and a serious rift developed between herself

and her husband. When Adam and young Franz began their concert tours, she parted from her husband and went to live with a sister. Franz was devoted to her and the nervous illness he suffered a few years later may have been aggravated by his parents' parting.

With his father, he travelled widely, giving concerts. At the age of 12 he is reputed to have played as well as Moschales and Hummel, the two acknowledged virtuosi of the day. (By the time he was 19, he was undisputed champion of them all!) He had two successful tours of England in 1824/25 and another in 1827. When on his return to France he went for a rest to Bologna, his father died there. His sudden demise was a shock to the young boy, who agreed to pay off all his father's debts, sent for his mother to join him in Paris and, at the age of 16 years, started to teach to support his mother and himself.

It was merely a matter of time, however, before he was so outstanding a performer that he resumed his concert tours and his 'virtuoso' period began. This spanned the years 1839-47, during which time he travelled widely, acquiring great fame as an exceptional performer.

His second period of development took place during 1848-61, the years he spent in Weimar as Conductor and Musical Director to the Weimar Grand Ducal Court. These were the years of his greatest composing productivity, remarkable in view of the fact that whilst at Weimar, he was responsible for the organizing and production of stage works at the Weimar theatre. He produced the operas of many different composers; Gluck, Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven, Halèvy, Meyerbeer, Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Berlioz and Wagner. He also conducted the Weimar orchestra, in which we find the foundation of the modern orchestra as we know it today. With this orchestra Liszt set the first standards of modern orchestral playing. (22.152) It was also during these Weimar years that he wrote many essays on musical subjects.

His final period spanned the years 1861-86, in which he spent each year divided between Rome (from July to November or December), Weimar (April to June) and Budapest (January, February and March), during which time he was most active as a teacher, while still devoting

time to composing.

So Liszt ended life as he began it - as a person of divided nationality. He referred to his threefold life as 'Vie Trifurquee'. (22.257) Throughout his life, too, he suffered uncertainty as to what language he could rightly call his own. As a child in Hungary, he spoke German, partly because his mother was an Austrian and also because Austria frowned on minority languages.⁽²⁾ He arrived in Vienna as a foreigner, a Hungarian who spoke German. He left it two years later to become to all intents and purposes a Frenchman - but no Frenchman took him for anything but a foreigner. When at Weimar, he once again spoke German but was French in his tastes and mannerisms. When, in his final years, he lived part of each year in Budapest, he was unable to master the Hungarian language, the language of his birthplace.

In considering Liszt's background, it is necessary to assess how much impact the romantic movement had upon his personality.

In practical terms, romanticism wrought great changes in the lives of musicians. This was the era of the steam engine, telegraph, universal press. The French Revolution had brought about a levelling of the classes. Until then musicians had usually been in the employ of aristocracy or church, but musicians of the romantic era were free-lancers who no longer wrote music for the socially elite, but composed for the middle class. Romantic musicians became increasingly aware, too, that they were now of the same class as their audiences. Chopin was son of a school-master; Berlioz, son of a doctor; Schumann, son of a publisher; Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, sons of bankers, etc. Music now became the province of the common man as conservatories were founded, concert-halls built, virtuoso performers lauded. At the same time attitudes towards the role of the conductor changed from regarding him as an insignificant background figure to that of orchestral leader, eventually to assume as much importance as the solo performer. There were no more journey-men musicians. Leopold Mozart's statement to the Leipzig publishers that his son

(2) Latin was official in Magyar society until 1805.

would write whatever composition they considered most profitable was inconceivable to the Romantics. They attached a new significance to the status of musician and felt entitled to greater rewards than their predecessors. It is with the Romantics that we begin to find a link between a man's life and his music. Liszt, Chopin, Berlioz and Wagner are all composers in whose lives the sources of inspiration for their music is reflected in individual works. Romantic art was its own justification and no longer a question of meeting the requirements of some employer. But with this new freedom came a host of problems, the main one being no reliable income and composers who followed their own bent stood the chance of incurring public disapproval with consequent material loss. It says much for Liszt that he survived the tensions and stresses. He did not die young like Chopin and Schubert or suffer insanity like Schumann. Because musicians now ignored, to a large extent, popular taste to pursue individualism, they were often misunderstood and criticized. A world of self-consciousness arose. Audiences demanded heroes.

A new awareness of inspiration from extra-musical sources was born - the beauties of nature, ⁽³⁾ fertilization from other arts; the exotic. Along with this, one finds an increased emphasis on humanitarian ideals in revolt against the dehumanization following in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. In youth, the romantic artist often fancied himself an anarchist, even though in later life he usually moderated his views and tended towards conservatism. What Romantic and anarchist shared, was an assessment of their culture ... art was no less art for being indigenous, composed in native idiom. Romanticism, hostile to science, nevertheless met scientific requirements when it threw out academic norms and judged a work in terms of its inherent quality - but did so for social and not scientific reasons. In countries like Russia, whose art, music and architecture had till then been considered near-barbaric, Romanticism brought about a revaluation of national heritage. A new reverence for Nationalism in music emerged.

(3) Lamartine: "Look well on nature ... whose inspirations are worth more than those of the salons." (19.40/41)

By 1830 the artist was aware that the industrial revolution was being engineered for a class that ignored his needs but ruthlessly exploited his talents. It was this feeling of being one with the oppressed that drove the Romantic to involve himself with social implications. He had such high hopes ... which were seldom realised. Yet he did not give in to his bleak circumstances as a later generation did; for example, the black resignation of Baudelaire. Once Romanticism had passed, Gautier wrote:-

"Today's generation have difficulty imagining the effervescence of spirits in that epoch; it was a movement like the Renaissance. The sap of life circulated. Everything germinated, burgeoned, burst out at once. Dizzying scents came from the flowers; the air intoxicated and one was mad with lyricism and art. One felt one was about to rediscover the lost secret and it was true; one had rediscovered poetry."
(19.28)

Hugo's 'Cromwell' with a preface undertook to define Romantic dogma:

"Our era is above all dramatic and by this fact, lyric also." (19.28)

Romanticism had thus become larger than life!

It was the French Romantics and not their English or German counterparts who were writing and painting romantically and who demanded full recognition. They were the first to form a militant coterie, 'a vanguard claiming an artistic radicalism 'art for our time'. Romanticism in music, by its very nature, was a revolutionary movement directed against the fathers and grandfathers of the revolutionary generation and most of the romantic composers were totally opposed to what they considered to be classicism. Berlioz, for example, hated Bach and felt only contempt for Handel. (8.4) Yet at the same time as the arch-romantics were blazing a trail in new directions, there were those composers who still looked on the past with awe - Schubert, Schumann and Brahms, for example, in whose works classical traits are found side by side with romantic. They did not wish to sever the ties that linked them with the past and were afraid of breaking away from it.

Even in operatic fields the antithesis of 'new' versus 'old' is found. On the one hand we have Wagner, the revolutionary who struck out on a road that was individual and egocentric; on the other, Verdi, with his roots in a 200 year-old tradition to which he clung tenaciously, idolized by his public.

Another pair of contrasts was that of theatricality and intimacy. Romanticism, with its emphasis on greater subjectivity, of withdrawal into the secret areas of the soul, is illustrated in the intimate piano works of Chopin and Schumann. Yet concurrently with this, exhibitionistic works of the utmost brilliance and virtuosity were equally a facet of romanticism. Consider the works of Carl Maria Von Weber, whose piano music was entirely of a brilliant nature, and later, of course, the works of Liszt.

Then again, we find the contrasts of clarity and mysticism. Mendelssohn is a supreme example of clarity and symmetry. Berlioz found the servile following of rules odious. Yet both derived from Beethoven. One saw in Beethoven only the master who perfected form, subduing all violence and restoring order from chaos. The other saw in him only the revolutionary who transformed the symphony and unchained dark and mystical forces. (8.6)

In the Romantic era we also find the different aspects of absolute and programme music. For some composers, music was inconceivable without the inspiration of other arts. For others, like Mendelssohn, the idea that music should take its rise from extra-musical sources was distasteful. He maintained that good music did not become better or more intelligent through 'poetic' inspiration, but that instead it became less significant and less clear. (8.6)

Taking the above into consideration, it is small wonder that audiences of the time were confused. On the one hand they were excited by romantic literature and art and welcomed the same regeneration of music. They were greatly attracted to novelty, which had its dangers, for what is novel can be exploited to become debasement of art. On the other, they were attuned to the sounds and ideals of the 18th century and were bewildered by the new music, often to the point of angry rejection. This posed a major problem for the Romantic

composer. He longed to be one of the favoured, to win fame and fortune by pleasing his public, yet he considered his art a holy calling understood only by the enlightened few. While musicians disagreed amongst themselves, they were united in their attitude that they were a class apart, to be held in high esteem. Hurtful criticism from an ignorant public merely caused them to retreat into a position of isolation, more than ever determined to continue on their chosen path. For them there had to be the constant challenge of new horizons, new fields to conquer.

Some of their 'fields' were indeed difficult ones. On the whole, the level of romantic music appreciation even in the ranks of the arts was below that of previous eras. Balzac described an orchestra as being:

"an ill-assorted and bizarre assembly ... wherein inexplicable movements take place, where they all seem to be blowing their noses more or less at the same time." (19.46)

Gautier said:

"Music is the most disagreeable and expensive of all noises." (19.46)

Poets, too, regarded music more in the light of an aphrodisiac than an art itself.

"Music is the vapour of art", said Hugo. "It is to poetry what reverie is to thought." (19.46)

He, along with Musset and Gautier, did not have any real interest in music.

How did all this affect Liszt? He started by living in a small Paris apartment with his mother, earning a living by teaching. He ended that phase of his career by becoming supreme virtuoso of the piano, enchanting thousands. Paris was the art-centre of the world, as also the major centre of musical activity. Writers, painters and musicians enriched its society. Rossini, Bellini and Meyerbeer were the revered names in operatic circles. Audiences

were in a high state of romantic tension brought about by literature of the time. Paris was also, in the 1830's, the centre of the virtuoso pianist.

The impressionable young Liszt was caught in the grip of romantic fervour. Perenyi goes so far as to say:

"He was the child of French Romanticism, and its prisoner." (19.3)

Aware of the deficiencies in his education, Liszt read avidly - Goethe, Dante, René. He also immersed himself in the music of other composers. His hectic absorption of the arts amounted to what is a search for identity. Also, being a great traveller, he was exposed to a wealth of influences. His willingness to absorb them was not only a desire to improve his self-image, but was also an expression of the Romantic's interest in the exotic. In a letter to a pupil in 1832, he wrote:-

"For this fortnight my spirit and my fingers are working like the damned. Homer, the Bible, Plato, Byron, Hugo, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Beethoven, Bach, Hummel, Mozart, Weber are all around me. I study them, think about them, devour them with fury." (19.54)

Even his handwriting caused him shame. All this led to a misplaced respect for people he considered more cultured than himself, while his reading on art, philosophy and politics led him to think subversively. In the revolution of 1830, which drew him out of the dark depression following the ending of his first love affair, he had only the haziest impression of what it was all about, but he was on the side of the rebels and immediately began to compose a 'revolutionary symphony'. After the first movement had been completed, it, like the revolution, came to nothing. Liszt was later to change his mind about revolutions, but in 1834 he was once again the passionate supporter of striking workers at Lyon.

His essays 'On the situation of Artists', May/Oct 1835 in the Gazette Musicale reveal his awareness of the exploitation of artists by the public. An excerpt reads:-

"For the artist - sufferings, debasement, persecution. For art - shackles, exploitation, economic reforms, institutions, the opera, the schools and so on, that are either imperfect or baneful - gags and handcuffs. Everywhere among all classes of executant musicians, professors, composers, we hear complaints, recantations, expressions of discontent or rage, vows of change or reform, aspirations towards a future that will be broader and more satisfactory ... more or less openly, more or less profoundly, all are suffering - all suffer!" (19.27)

Liszt soon proved himself a supremely talented pianist. Add to this his exotic origins, his beauty of face and form, his temperament, and he could not fail to be desired in romantic circles. In that world, the uncolourful personality did not have a chance. Liszt soon became aware of this. Small wonder that he fell victim to pandering to it - nor was he the only one. He became the darling of a spoiled society. Nor could he convince himself that social life was an evil, or, given Hugo's example, that it interfered with the artist's output. In fairness, had he not been able to insinuate himself into the artistic group of gregarious and exhaustingly creative people, to live among them, he might never have amounted to anything as a composer - and certainly not the one we know. His association with writers and poets did help turn the infant prodigy into a cosmopolitan composer. In his own mind he belonged to those heroic few doomed to glory and misfortune, in whom life and art are one and whose creations are beyond the understanding of ordinary mortals. In a letter to George Sand, he wrote:-

"The work of certain artists is their life ... the musician above all, who is inspired by nature, but without copying it, exhales in sound his life's most intimate mysteries. He thinks, he feels, he speaks in music, but because his language, more arbitrary and less definite than all others, lends itself to a multitude of diverse interpretations ... it is not unprofitable for the composer to give in a few lines the psychic sketch of his work ... to explain the fundamental idea of his composition ... prefaces become absolutely necessary ... for compositions of the modern school which generally aspire to be expressions of tormented individuality." (19.42)

Even in his social life, Liszt suffered a kind of dualism. Mixing with poets and writers, his compositional faculties were aroused. He desired above all else to be a composer of worth. In a letter to the Countess Marie d'Agoult, he wrote:-

"I saw our friends Hugo and Demas again this week. Decidedly it is the only world, the only society I will frequent in future. The rest seems so empty to me; so boring and pointless ... when I've spent a few hours with V.H. (Hugo), I feel a crowd of hidden ambitions stirring in my heart." (19.23)

When he played for his friends, they were unmoved. One disgruntled listener described a Liszt performance in these terms:-

"Hair to the winds, his glance fixed on the ceiling as if looking for inspiration, he lets his hands fall casually on the keyboard, which makes dissonant sounds, and is feeling his way to a prelude when suddenly he gets up, closes the piano with a bang and announces that the bear won't dance tonight!" (19.48)

Then again, mixing in elite circles - he was the first composer to crash the barrier and become a social equal - time was freely wasted on pleasantries that were not conducive to making him into a serious composer. These people were only interested in him as a spectacular performer. The concert tours that brought him into the homes of such people earned him fame and money and cultivated all his latent weaknesses too. They fanned his tremendous conceit, as also his ambitions to be the supreme virtuoso of the keyboard. So greatly did he desire adulation and recognition that he resorted to all the degrading tricks of showmanship in order to focus attention upon himself. Sitwell maintains that it was the shackles of his own virtuosity in the sense that all eyes were upon him that made Liszt use mere tinsel and glitter where he was capable of so much deeper feeling. (Preface 22.xx) Liszt was aware of the weakening influences from moving in elevated society, both to himself and his contemporaries. In a letter to Wilhelmhenz in 1872 he wrote:-

"You exaggerate, I think, the influence of the Paris salons exercised on Chopin ... his work

as an artist remains ... of an incomparable genius ... quite outside the errors of a school and the silly trifling of a salon." (27.32)

While this may have been true of Chopin, it was not so of Liszt. The fluctuation in quality of his own compositions, the flashy pieces he performed for his public while reserving the best music for his own enjoyment seems to indicate that the dictates of society certainly held sway with him.

Liszt, along with fellow-artists, was caught into the whirlpool of humanitarianism. He became attracted to Saint Simonism - the most moving and coherent philosophy to appear in the wake of the French Revolution. Saint Simon, foreseeing the impact of technology, strove to humanize it. This sect had broken with formal worship and preached universal brotherhood of man. Saint Simon was not a democrat. His hierarchy consisted of savants, the propertied and unpropertied. Power was to be in the hands of the experienced (the aristocracy!), the 'people' being given a largely passive role for their own good. Saint Simon's immediate successors were religious cranks who degraded his philosophy to the state of a cult. (He died in 1825.) By 1830 a man named Enfantin became the leader of the cult, proclaiming himself the new Christ and founding a commune of free lovers and talentless self-seekers who wore fancy dress and went their own way at the expense of conventions. Enfantin was eventually imprisoned for disturbing the peace. Not surprisingly, his unbalanced behaviour and bad reputation ended the movement in France and by 1832, most of its earlier followers were quick to renounce any connection with it, Liszt among them. Yet from Saint Simonists, Liszt learned of his membership of the only worthy aristocracy - that of talent, and some thirty years later, wrote to a friend:-

"At the risk of seeming still very naïve to you, I will confess that I think more highly of the utility of certain ideas formerly preached by the disciples of Saint Simon, than it is expedient to say in the drawing-rooms of statesmen ... 'The moral, intellectual and physical amelioration of the poorest and most numerous class';

'the pacific exploitation of the globe'; 'science associated with industry'; 'art joined to worship' and the famous apportionment 'according to capacity' do not seem to me fantasies empty of sense.'
(19.100)

His adoption of humanitarian ideals led to a sympathetic fellow-feeling for the families left destitute when the Danube flooded its banks in 1838. Liszt visited Hungary to raise funds for the victims through a series of recitals. This visit awoke other aspects of Romanticism in him. The influence of his native land resulted in a love for the exotic and a new-found Nationalism. He was excited by homeland landscapes, literature, language and melodic and rhythmic idioms. His subsequent travels among the gypsies strengthened these feelings. On his return from his recitals in Hungary, he wrote to Lambert Massand:-

"I was suddenly carried back into the past and found again in my heart, pure and intact, the treasures of my youthful memories. Nature in her grandeur, spread itself out before my eyes; I saw the Danube dashing over the rocks; I saw the vast grassy plains on which thousands of sheep were peacefully browsing. It was Hungary, that generous and fertile land, which had reared a noble race! It was my native land!" (19.69/70)

From then onwards until his death he laid claim to Hungary. From about 1870 he began his annual visits to Budapest to organize a circle of pupils who would later form the nucleus of the piano class at the new Music Academy, which opened in 1875 with himself as Director, taking piano classes for three or four months of the year. While much criticism has been levied at Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies as being a mere parody, and more akin to gypsy music, he had great support from men of his own country - Bence Szabolczi, Bartok and Janka Wohl, who said of these Rhapsodies that they are truly Hungarian, though he maintained it needed Liszt to play them to have any idea of their worth.

"I shall never forget ... when he played the second of these Rhapsodies. It was a revelation. For the first time I felt that the artist was truly blood of our blood, and that, if his lips

could not speak our language, his soul spoke it all the better." (5.70)

Count Apponyi, Liszt's Hungarian friend said in his memoirs:-

"He absorbed the themes of Hungarian folk music and was able to make use of them as only one born to understand them could do ... we need only compare the manner in which he introduces Hungarian themes into the oratorio St. Elizabeth without robbing them of their national flavour, and also his Hungarian Rhapsodies with the beautiful but intensely German dances of Brahms, to realize that Ferencz List's (sic) work is a genuine product of the Hungarian spirit and that it is no pretension but an undeniable fact when we claim him as our own." (5.71)

Non-Hungarians also see authenticity in Liszt's Hungarian works. Sitwell quotes his 'Flower Waltz' from the Dante Symphony as evidence of Liszt's understanding of the art and wiles of the gypsies, "if, indeed, he was not part Tzigane himself." (Preface, 22.xxii) Of the Rhapsodies, he points out that Liszt tried to reproduce the effects of the Tzigane band with cymbalon and violins and that listened to in this light, they become less hackneyed. Saint-Saëns is in agreement:-

"It is entirely wrong to consider them merely brilliant pieces. In them we find a reconstruction, and if we may so say, a civilizing of a national music of the highest artistic interest. The composer aimed at ... a picturesque effect and a vivid reproduction of the outlandish orchestra of the Tziganes." (26.235)

Whether one agrees with the above statements or feels that Liszt's new-found patriotism was merely another Liszt affectation, one must concede that if so, it was a lasting one and believed by many fellow-musicians to be authentic.

There is therefore no denying the influence of Romanticism on Franz Liszt. Bartok put it clearly when he said in an address on 'Liszt as Composer' in 1934:-

"It is humanly very understandable that he did not reject his romantic century with all its exaggerations. From this comes his own exaggeratedly rhetorical pathos and no doubt it also explains the concessions he makes to the public, even in his finest works. But whoever picks out only these weaknesses - and there are still some music lovers who do - does not see the essence behind them and an unbiased judgement without the recognition of the essence is impossible!" (18.421)

Thus we return to Franz Liszt as a young man in the early 1830's, who even then, on the threshold of life, was filled with contradictory emotions. When one considers his background, it is small wonder that he was a complex individual driven by divided ambitions.

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F. LISZT — THE CHILD



1824



1825



Chapter II

PIANIST/COMPOSER

"I feel no vocation in me, nor can I discover it outside myself ... I have all the amour-propre and all the pride of a high destiny; what I haven't is a calm and sustained conviction ... two contrary forces are at war in me. One pushes me to the immensity of infinite space; higher, always higher, beyond the suns ... the other draws me towards the lowest, darkest regions of calm, of death, of nothingness. And I stay nailed to my chair, equally miserable in my strength and my weakness, not knowing what will become of me ..."

(Franz Liszt, in the journal he shared with Countess d'Agoult when in Italy. [19.99/100])

Kentner spoke truly when he said:-

"Any piece of writing concerning Liszt the composer or Liszt the pianist or simply Liszt, the most powerful musical figure of his time, automatically becomes a speech for the Defence or for the Prosecution - the common fate of controversial musicians." (16.178)

From the time Liszt first became aware of himself as a musician, he was pulled in two directions; whether to perform, or whether to compose. As we have seen from the first chapter, Liszt's natural gifts as a virtuoso pianist were overwhelming. At a concert on 1 December 1822, with artists of the calibre of Karoline Unger and a well-known French violinist, it was the child pianist, then eleven years old, who created a sensation. The correspondent of a Leipzig newspaper reported:-

"A young virtuoso has again dropped from the clouds and filled us with supreme admiration. It is almost unbelievable what this boy can do, considering his age." (17.17)

When Liszt first heard Paganini, virtuoso violinist, play in 1831,

he was electrified at the freedom and unbelievable sounds the violinist wrought from his instrument and immediately set about transferring these technical experiments on the violin to the piano. He did not develop his exceptional technique merely in order to dazzle his hearers and show that he was better than his rivals. He did it because he was thereby able to draw new and almost orchestral effects from the piano, which incomparably widened its range of expression - and all subsequent composers for the piano are grateful to him. He practised technical exercises with complete dedication. Twelve paper-back volumes of these exercises bear witness to the patient single-minded toil with which he created his new perfected technique. They include scales, arpeggios, octaves and all kinds of double-notes as well as exercises for independent finger action. His aim was to play the instrument as well as it could be played. (16.166) Using a set of Paganini's unaccompanied Caprices, he adapted their complexities for the piano, resulting in 1838 in the six Paganini studies, a breakthrough in piano technique.

This hard work combined with his great natural talent made of him the greatest pianist the world had known and probably to this day, has known. It is difficult to visualise the impact he made upon his audiences. It is only from testimonies of musicians of the time, many of whom disliked him as a man, that we can begin to appreciate the extent of his talent.

Liszt's performances were not mere technical feats but were valid artistic experiences. He stunned audiences and musicians alike with his musical and performing skills. That his talent extended beyond showmanship can be illustrated through many examples - e.g. as at a Dublin concert, when, after improvising on three themes handed to him from the audience, he combined all three with the greatest ingenuity. (27.49) He played the entire available repertoire of the time and his own brilliant adaptations. Nor was his talent limited to mere manual skill - he was a supremely gifted interpreter, establishing a performance tradition that survives to the present time and has been an inspirational force to uncountable pianists.

When Brahms visited Liszt at the Altenberg, Liszt sight-read the Scherzo from Brahms Op.4 from the untidy manuscript in such a way

that Brahms 'was amazed and delighted'. (19.316) Grieg took his piano concerto to Liszt in Weimar and was moved by the magnificent rendition Liszt gave at sight. A student of Liszt's Master Class, circa 1880, describing a Liszt performance, expressed rather well his ability to capture the essence of a composition in his interpretation:-

"... a cold shiver passed through me, not so much at what he actually bestowed on us, as at what he suggested as having still in reserve ... what astonished and impressed me most was not so much that his fingers were responsive to every motion of the mind; I wondered at the mind, which one felt instinctively was gifted with the power of taking in at one rapid glance every possible variety of passage which has ever been written for the pianoforte." (5.138)

Liszt, explaining how the first movement of Schumann's Fantasie Op.17 should be played, said to a pupil that when he himself had played it to Schumann, Schumann jumped from his chair, embraced Liszt with tears in his eyes and said that their ideas on its interpretation were identical, 'and only you with your magic fingers have carried my ideas to a realization that I had never dreamed of.' (5.64 and 30.165)

Chopin, in a letter to Ferdinand Hiller, wrote:-

"... at this moment Liszt is playing my etudes (in Chopin's apartment) and transporting me out of my respectable thoughts. I should like to steal from him the way to play my own etudes." (Preface, 22.xxxi)

None of the above musicians would have been impressed by mere brilliance. It was Liszt's interpretive ability that won their admiration.

Liszt was the first performer in musical history to relate his life to literature and see himself in the light of a hero, a musical version of the poete maudit. Aside from his great performing gifts and sex appeal, what moved audiences was his representation of a type familiar to literature but not to music - a conscious creation arrived at through adoption of literary images. He cut a truly

romantic figure. Biographer Perenyi goes so far as to say that if Byron and Hugo had never lived, there would have been no Liszt. (19.50)

Liszt's attitude to his performing skills was initially one of delight. He staged numerous concerts throughout his years as a virtuoso pianist but was equally happy to play to small gatherings of friends and acquaintances. We know little about what he played for his friends in the 1830's, because they knew too little to tell us. We are repeatedly told of his genius - 'it has well been said that he is the apocalypse', but hardly ever given the name of a composition. (19.47)

While half-agreeing with the Countess Marie d'Agoult, the first of his great loves, that his virtuoso career was a menace to his loftier intentions, he wrote to her from Paris:-

"It is my only fortune ... my only title, my unique possession that I don't want anyone to touch!" (19.137)

Nor could any other performer of his day 'touch' it! Thalberg, a rising virtuoso pianist, challenged Liszt and was vanquished. Liszt compared with Thalberg was the more artistic, more vibrant, more electric. (22.112/113) Berlioz in his critiques covered the Thalberg and Liszt concerts and was amazed at Liszt's performance. There was no tendency towards exaggeration or embellishment. He played Beethoven's Hammerklavier sonata

"in a manner that, if the composer could have heard it in his grave, would have sent a thrill of joy and pride over him. Not a note was left out, not one added. (I followed, score in hand); no inflection was effaced, no change of tempo permitted ... Liszt, in thus making comprehensible a work not yet comprehended, has proved that he is the pianist of the future." (19.138)

In comparing Liszt with Thalberg, Rubinstein commented:-

"Liszt plays like a God, Thalberg like a grocer." (26.16)

Rubinstein himself, incidentally, was a formidable competitor to Liszt but was humble enough to say:-

"If you have ever had the privilege of hearing Liszt play, you have heard the greatest of all pianists!" (5.67)

Liszt bent the piano to his will and demanded everything from the instrument. According to biographer Kentner, Liszt's pupils maintained that, so far from being nothing but

"a lion tearing into the bleeding flesh of pianos and leaving behind him bunches of broken strings, Liszt could, in fact, make the instrument sing and whisper and move his audience to tears." (16.165)

Even Schindler, who perhaps disagreed with Liszt's interpretation of Beethoven, admitted that the spirituality and the fully committed personality of Liszt made even his 'un-Beethovenish Beethoven' totally believable. Liszt did not, in fact, abuse his manual skills but put them to the service of music. (16.165)

Contemporaries who heard him play were awed by his ability, even the concert pianists among them, for example:-

Clara Wieck:

"Liszt played at sight what we toil over and at the end get nowhere with." (20.179)

and:

"We have heard Liszt. He can be compared with no other player. He arouses fright and astonishment ... his passion knows no limits ... his appearance at the piano is indescribable. He is original ... he is absorbed by the piano." (12.151 and 30.161)

Sir Charles Halle:

"I heard Liszt for the first time at one of his concerts and went home with a feeling of thorough dejection. Such marvels of executive skill and power I could never have imagined. He was a giant and Rubinstein spoke the truth

when at a time when his own triumphs were greatest, he said that in comparison with Liszt, all other pianists were children. Liszt was all sunshine and dazzling splendour, subjugating his hearers with a power that none could withstand. For him there were no difficulties of execution; the most incredible-seeming child's play under his fingers. One of the transcendent merits of his playing was the crystal-like clearness which never failed for a moment even in the most complicated, and to everyone else, impossible passages; it was as if he had photographed them in their minutest detail upon the ear of his listener. The power he drew from his instrument was such as I have never heard since, but never harsh, never suggesting thumping." (15.58. and 22.41)

Karl Tausig:

"Compared with Liszt, all other artists are blockheads." (26.11)

Other contemporary musicians of stature were overwhelmed by Liszt's performances. Robert Schumann, on hearing Liszt's Fantasy on Themes of Pacini at a recital at Leipsig, wrote:-

But I would sacrifice all the astonishing bravura that he displayed here for the sake of the magical tenderness that he expressed in the following etude. With the sole exception of Chopin ... I know no-one who could equal it." (18.157)

Mendelssohn admitted that he was unparalleled; that he could play with

"a degree of virtuosity, a complete finger independence and a thoroughly musical feeling that can scarcely be equalled. In a word, I have heard no performer whose musical perceptions so extend to the very tips of his fingers." (20.179)

and:

"He gave me very great pleasure by his really masterly playing ... he is genuinely artistic and one can't help loving him even if one doesn't always agree with him." (17.88)

Saint-Saëns claimed that in Liszt's playing, the most diverse gifts met, even those which seemed to contradict one another, such as absolute correctness combined with the most extravagant fancy. He added what must have been one of the highest compliments ever paid to Liszt:-

"The remembrance of his playing consoles me for being no longer young." (25.242)

This adulation was only excelled by a comment of Heine's:-

"The winter sunlight streamed in and lighted up the silvery hair that reached down to his shoulders and I felt as I listened and looked and realized that he was aged and therefore could not be with us very long, that I would gladly give up my life just to add to his precious existence." (5.137)

One would have thought that with such unparalleled talent and the admiration it won from all sectors of society, Franz Liszt would have been content, but far from it. During his virtuoso years his aim was to conquer fame and free himself of the shackles which bound him and then change his career to one of composing. In his early days as a performer, whilst in Italy in 1838, he wrote:-

"I am perhaps a genius manque - only time will show. I only know I am not a mediocrity. My mission will be to have introduced poetry into piano music with some brilliance. What I attach most importance to is my harmonies; they will be my most serious work. I will sacrifice everything to it. When I've finished my tour as a pianist I will play only for my own public. I will shape and elevate it." (1)
(19.165)

Even at that stage he envisioned only a limited career as virtuoso performer and consequently, at the early age of 36, retired from the concert platform for good. He still, however, played in public in order to raise funds for charitable causes and often played in

(1) Beckett doubts the sincerity of Liszt's intention to educate his public by leading them to an appreciation of better music as he says it was 'at odds with the vibrations of our flamboyant actor.' (5.37)

private for friends and students. Indeed in his last years we notice an increased desire to play the piano anywhere and at any time just for the sheer joy of playing.

Abandoning the concert platform was a great sacrifice to Liszt and is proof of the sincerity of his intention to lift his life to a higher level. Yet he recognised that the years spent as a virtuoso pianist were a necessary part of his development.

His interest in composing had shown itself as early as aged 13 and 14, when he was writing etudes for his own musical advancement. Even though they were not meant to be concert pieces, they outstripped in technical brilliance the virtuoso concert pieces of his time. (17.29)

Czerny gave measured praise to his pupil's published compositions:-

"If he gains with maturity the necessary experience in technique, organisation, correct phrasing and harmony; if he learns to avoid the youthful mistake of getting round difficulties, he will certainly soon produce something important as a piano composer." (17.28)

The Paganini Etudes and the twelve Transcendental Etudes were conceived as a vehicle to give those who possess an outstanding technique the opportunity to display their skill. In his 1838 review, Schumann described the Transcendental Etudes as 'Studies in form and dread, fit only for 10 or 12 players in the world.' (27.35) Liszt himself recognised their supreme difficulty and later simplified them in 1851, the version usually played today. Even now, with the final edition more than eighty years old, there are few pianists who can do them justice.

Various biographers differ in opinion as to the extent of Liszt's composing talent. Beckett, in comparing it with his performing talent, refers to it as the much smaller of the two. (5.36) Kentner refers to 'the conflict in an artist equally gifted in two directions.' (16.179) It is certain, however, that in his own time Liszt stood no chance at all of being considered a composer of worth because of his reputation as an outstanding performer and also because of

his individual composing style which was beyond the comprehension of most of his contemporaries.

Liszt summed up his attitude to music in the following words:-

"Music ... presents at one and the same time the intensity and the expression of feeling ... if music calls itself the supreme art, if Christian spiritualism has transported it, as alone worthy of heaven, into the celestial world, this supremacy lies in the pure flames of emotion that beat one against another from heart to heart without the aid of reflection; without having to wait on accident for the opportunity of self-assertion."

(my underlining 23.109)

This explains two aspects of his compositions that were, and to this day are, highly criticized; viz; the improvisational nature of his composing techniques which resulted in works of very uneven quality; and the emotional content of his music which took its rise from a variety of sources. Liszt's music was not a creation of his intellect, but the spontaneous expression of his innermost being. Hughes expressed this very well when he wrote:-

"Another type of composer does not wait for an idea stemming from an emotional experience to germinate, for the slow metamorphosis of the first outer stimulus into an inner spiritual substance out of which the work of art will grow organically ... but hastens to record the stimulus while it is still diffusing its first heat within him. Such is Liszt." (13.142)

Saint-Saëns explained it thus:-

"Perhaps he made the mistake of believing too implicitly in his own creation; of wishing to impose it on the world too soon." (25.242)

He composed quickly while under the impulse of inspiration, with later revision more of a technical than expressional nature. Liszt took fire from everything he approached. Every experience inspired him. Pictures by Raphael resulted in 'Marriage of the Virgin' and 'Il Penseroso'; a statue of Michael Angelo, in 'Il Sposalizio'; a picture of Kulbach inspired the symphonic poem 'The Slaughter

of the Huns'; poems of Hugo, Lamartine and Schiller gave rise to the symphonic poems 'What you see from the Mountain', 'Les Preludes' and 'Ideals'. Nature also stirred his imagination. Visits to his native country resulted in the symphonic poem 'Hungaria'. The sights and sounds of Switzerland, where he first lived with the Countess d'Agoult, were the source from which he drew his first volume of 'Years of Pilgrimage', which is almost impressionistic in character. His later tours of the Italian lakes resulted in the second volume, which was inspired by the works of art he saw. Goethe's birthday celebrations resulted in the symphonic poem 'Tasso'. 'The Divine Comedy', 'Faust' and 'Hamlet' gave rise to further symphonic poems. In addition, Liszt had an unending curiosity and interest in music of other composers, strong enough Sitwell feels, to have been detrimental to his own compositional faculties. (22.24) He adds that the impact of events upon Liszt's personality is apparent in even the smallest of his works and his compositions are inseparable from his life to a greater extent than in the case of most other composers. (Preface, 22.xxxvi) Saint-Saëns claimed that Liszt's music is thus spontaneous and sincere and that his compositional faults may well be ascribed to 'the overcrowding of impressions upon the brain.' (25.249)

Personalities, too, had a great influence on Liszt's approach to composition. Chopin's example taught him to contain the exuberance of his personality and proved to him that there was no need for mere brilliant display; the strength and grace of poetic expression was sufficient in itself. Berlioz's handling of the orchestra, high-lighting both the solo quality of individual instruments and their massed impressiveness excited Liszt's interest, as also Berlioz's conviction that programme music was the music of the future; the fusion of literary ideas with music.

Bartok quotes the following diverse and irreconcilable influences found in Liszt's compositions - Berlioz's rather commonplace melody; Chopin's sentimentality; Italian Bel Canto; gypsy rhythms; Gregorian Chant; Spanish and Italian folk music. (19.51)

Another factor that contributed to Liszt's lack of appeal as a composer

was that while he was a supremely confident, and one may almost say, supercilious performer, as a composer he was racked with self-doubt. He was aware that he lacked self-criticism, but always felt a burning need to express the ideas which came to him. In a letter written to Saint-Saëns in Rome on December 6, 1881, he wrote:-

"No-one realises more than myself the disproportion in my compositions between the good intention and the results accomplished ... but to aim high is not forbidden us; whether we touch the goal or not remains an open question."
(25.245)

Such self-doubt was, however, hardly conducive to inspiring confidence in others, and their lack of faith in his ability to compose in turn fed Liszt's lack of self-confidence and resulted in a vicious circle. This sometimes had unfortunate consequences. When he was living with Princess Carolyne, he was all too willing to let her judge his pieces and often took her advice in altering them, although she was in no way qualified to do so. Many of his musical 'lapses' have been attributed to Princess Carolyne. To her, (and to him when under her influence), size was the first step to greatness regardless of the intellectual control demanded by a big subject. Liszt was often unwilling or unable to master the discipline to prune and refine and Princess Carolyne's uncritical adoration was no help. It is a fact that his least successful compositions are those most closely associated with her, as, for example, the Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses and Festklänge, (composed in 1853 in doubtful honour of their coming nuptials.) (19.403) How far Liszt altered compositions to please Princess Carolyne we shall never know, but alter them he did, as when he substituted a noisy ending to the Dante Symphony at her suggestion in place of the quiet and infinitely more suitable one he had first conceived for it. The fact that he allowed such alterations shows an uncertain approach to the art of composing - a man experimenting rather than a man expressing himself. (5.43)

When Liszt's close relationship with Princess Carolyne ended and he lived alone in the Altenberg in 1860-61, he started a new era

of composition, beginning with 'Der Traurige Mönch' based almost entirely on the whole-tone scale, in which the words are declaimed. After his 50th birthday, his romantic fervour waned and he turned from the big symphonic romantic constructions towards small piano pieces devoid of the glitter and assertiveness of earlier years and showing a new restraint and austerity.

During Liszt's last period when he lived part of each year in Weimar, Budapest and Rome, whilst in Rome he set to work upon church music on the largest possible lines. Possibly he turned to sacred music as consolation for the many disappointments he had suffered during his lifetime. Liszt regarded these sacred works as being a step on the way to higher things. He wished to express:-

"Religious absorption, Catholic devotion and exultation." (21.92)

That was one aspect of his approach to church music. The other, seen for example in his setting of Psalm 13, uses the dramatic technique of the symphonic poem, earning him the unjust accusation of being an 'effectmonger' - he simply wished to express the words in the manner he thought most fitting, and the fact that this work has lost none of its power today is its own justification. In his blend of scholarship, originality and devotion, he was probably the 19th century's greatest composer of religious music, but in Protestant countries his music was criticized for its showiness and sensuality; the Catholic church rejected his work for similar reasons. Liszt once remarked to Stradal that the church mistrusted him because he had written not only a Dante Symphony but a Faust Symphony as well. (24.11)

Not all of Liszt's later secular music was of the new experimental and austere kind. We still find arrangements in the virtuoso style of his youth. The Saint-Saëns Danse Macabre, Gounod's Waltz from Faust, the Csardas Obstine and Csardas Macabre are all brilliant showpieces. But it is his last prophetic works that reveal the profundity of Liszt's aspiration and his glimpse of the mode of thought of the 20th century; yet at the time they caused a flood of invective from critics like Hanslick and Esser. It is sad that

even at the close of his lifetime Liszt was still beset by doubts about his composing ability. At the Villa d'Este he wrote:-

"Oh how dry and unsatisfactory the sorrow and lamentation of almighty nature sounds on a piano - or even in an orchestra - unless it be Wagner's or Beethoven's!" (17.196)

He well knew that he would never be recognised as a major composer during his lifetime. As early as 1859 he was ironically referring to himself as 'that notorious non-composer, Franz Liszt'. (27.91) In later years he wrote in a letter to his pupil, Jessie Laussot:-

"It seems to me that Mr. Litz (sic), is, as it were, always welcome when he appears at the piano, (especially since he has made a profession of the contrary), but it is not permitted to him to have anything to do with thinking and writing according to his own fancy. The result is that for some 15 years, so-called friends as well as indifferent and ill-disposed people on all sides sing enough to split your head to this unhappy Mr. Litz (sic), who has nothing to do with it: 'Be a pianist and nothing but that. How is it possible for you not to be a pianist?'" (27.91)

Liszt's last big work, written in three weeks, was the Hungarian Coronation Mass for the crowning of Franz Joseph as King. Yet even in Hungary there was, for the most part, indifference to Liszt as composer and as great a lack of appreciation as found elsewhere.

One would have thought his friends, at least, would have had faith in him, but this was not so. While Berlioz did not actually say that Liszt was the greatest living pianist but a composer of little consequence, he showed it. Nowhere in his memoirs does he proclaim Liszt a composer of note but is filled with praise for his performing genius. His 30-odd years of criticism included exactly two notices about Liszt's compositions! Siloti idolized Liszt but did not regard him as much of a composer. Rubinstein admired him as a pianist but was a classicist himself and was bewildered by Liszt's radical approach to composition. Bulow, of whom Liszt said, 'My Hans ... the artist ... who is dearest to me and has grown out of

my musical heart', first loved Liszt, then by extension, his daughter, Cosima, and finally and fatally, Wagner. Music for Von Bulow became German or nothing and he scathingly attacked Liszt's 'un-music, quack-music, anti-music; an unexampled scar on the face.' (10.319)

Even the caricatures of Liszt which proliferated all over Europe attest the misrepresentation to which he was subject. The target of the satirists was always the pianist, never the composer. It was as if the composer did not exist.

In Liszt's later years his own music was so neglected that he could not forgo any opportunity to hear it played whenever a concert programme included any of his pieces. (22.310) After three years of increasing seclusion at the Villa d'Este, he attended a musical festival at Karlsruhe at the request of Von Bulow, where his own works met with surprising success. He ceased to think in terms of publication of his last works. Informing Maria Lipsius in 1878 of the completion of 'Christmas Tree', 'Via Crucis', 'Septem Sacramenta' and 'St. Francis Sun Hymn', he concluded:-

"I am not much interested in their publication for they do not fit well into the usual music routine." (24.42)

So, finally Liszt was composing only for himself, and once committed to the path of composition, he never swerved from it, despite the almost total lack of interest shown in his works. Where the threat of competition in the performing field had drawn him back to the concert stage to defeat Thalberg, the rise of pianistic giants of the stature of Rubinstein only drove him into greater isolation once he had turned to composition. Not even money difficulties in his later years could persuade him back to performing, even though all he needed to do was announce a public concert and his financial problems would have been solved.

He had admirers who did justice to his works. Leopold Damroch gave the Triomphe Funebre de Tasso its first performance in New York in 1877 with pomp and polish. Alexander Ritter, one of the instrumentalists of the Weimar orchestra, who became conductor at Stettin, often put Liszt in his programmes. But they were too

to counterbalance his critics. Support from musicians of a later era came too late to be of benefit to Liszt. Busoni claimed that composers as different as Franck, Debussy and the Russians were all descendants of Liszt. Bartok said of the E flat concerto, described in Vienna at the time as being the most vulgar concerto written, that it was:-

"the first perfect realization of the cyclic sonata form." (19.320)

After an intensive study of Liszt's pieces, he said:-

"The great artist's true significance was revealed to me at last. I came to recognise that, for the continued development of musical art, his compositions were more important than either Wagner's or Strauss's." (24.75)

Debussy said of Liszt:-

"The undeniable beauty of (his) work arises ... from the fact that his love of music excluded every other kind of emotion." (19.99 and 21.5)

Liszt's output is astonishing - over 700 published pieces, over half for the piano. (21.1) What is so remarkable is not only the number of ideas that came to him, but also the exceptional quality of so many. Walker maintains that in his finest works there is the sensation that no-one else has ever written, as Liszt did, for his instrument; that he is the transcendental composer for the piano. (Preface, 22.xxii and xxiii.) Beckett is of the opinion that while other pieces in virtuoso style appear to be losing vitality, Liszt's are attracting more attention as 'listeners and players alike discover ever greater depths and imaginative qualities in these pieces which once seemed just a mass of brilliant bravura passages.' (Foreword 5.v) It was Liszt's fate to be rejected by his contemporaries because he was too modern and by modernists in a later age because he chose to fly romantic colours, excepting for the austere works of his old age.

Biographer Kentner states that the conflict within any artist gifted

in two directions is a very real conflict, the solution of which depends on character. (16.179) For Liszt, notwithstanding the doubts and difficulties experienced, the faculty to create took precedence over the power to interpret. As a composer, he was uncompromising in living up to his high ideals. He was faithful to the last in composing the 'new' music, unacceptable though it was to the public. As a pianist, however, he was willing to give them what they wanted, whether it be pieces empty of all but brilliant display, or the alteration and embellishment of works of other composers. It is a strange quirk of his nature that he held in contempt that which came so easily to him, yet strove agonisingly for that which he felt eluded him by lying just beyond his grasp.

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F. LISZT - THE YOUNG MAN



Chapter III

SHOWMAN/SERIOUS MUSICIAN

"Yet how many things would and could Liszt do if he were not a famous man - or rather, if people had not made him famous. He would and could be a free artist; a little God, instead of what he now is - the slave of a tasteless, virtuoso-worshipping public. All this particular public demands from him is miracles and meretricious rubbish. He gives it what it wants, basks in its favour and plays ..."

(Richard Wagner in an article on Berlioz and Liszt. [14.133])

Richard Wagner knew Liszt both as a musician and a friend. The relationship between them was warmly affectionate and they were conversant with one another's virtues and faults. Had Liszt been merely a tinsel and glitter facade, Wagner would have been contemptuous of him and outspoken in his criticism. From the above quotation, it is clear that he felt the public more to blame for Liszt's showmanship than Liszt himself.

It should be remembered, too, that from the time Beethoven kissed the boy Liszt on the forehead, Liszt became aware of the advantages of showmanship. When one takes into account that his first formal training was as the result of sponsorship given him by noblemen who were impressed by his performing technique, one can understand how Liszt associated admiration and financial security with showmanship and why this quality held such sway with him as he developed as a musician.

When he first heard Paganini and saw the hypnotic effect he had on his audiences, Liszt realised that Paganini's attraction lay as much in his appearance and manner as in his playing. Forty-nine years old, he was small but so emaciated that he seemed tall; had dark and haggard features, long hands with talon-like fingers, an aquiline nose, sharp eyes, raven black locks, a huge forehead

and his yellowing body, riddled with disease, clad in black untidy clothing. His manner off-stage was distant; on-stage he seemed possessed by his instrument, his virtuosity so dazzling that it was akin to the monstrous; indeed, Paganini was attracted to the macabre and diabolical. He was a living example to Liszt of what power showmanship could wield over an audience. Liszt was entranced with the spectacle he presented:-

"Rene, what a man, what a violin, what an artist!
What suffering, torture and pain in those four
strings." (17.46)

Another musician whose performing technique attracted him, was Berlioz, who was extreme in everything. When he performed his own works, he seemed consumed by them. In 1840, when he conducted an open-air performance of his *Symphonie Funehre et Triomphale*, he conducted with a drawn sword and when it was over, lay stretched across the kettledrums weeping! (22.173) One can imagine how this uninhibited personality would have appealed to Liszt.

Countess Hanska, Balzac's mistress, summed Liszt up succinctly when she wrote:-

"There are sublime heights, but bottomless depths
... which will bring more than one disaster
on himself and others ... "

(quoted from her diary [19.225])

The main disaster which this duality brought about in Liszt's own life, was that it prevented him from having a firm sense of destiny and his confusion caused him to waver between his multiplicity of gifts so that it was hardly surprising that many of his contemporaries doubted his integrity. Torn between religion on one hand, his delight in worldly things on the other, his great ability as a performer and his burning desire to be a recognised composer distracted him from developing in any one direction. He became everything - pianist, showman, composer, conductor, critic, litterateur, Don Juan, Abbe, teacher, prophet and, at the end, The Grand Old Man of Music. (20.179) His life was a perpetual oscillation between

differing goals. His mournful sense of his general inability to master himself and shape his life as he would have wished it, is curiously reflected in his choice of certain poems for his songs and as epigraphs to his piano works. In work after work we come upon the musical equivalent of his character-traits - religious aspiration, perfumed eroticism, the heroic gesture, the theatrical attitude, the over-elaboration of manner, the malediction, peace succeeded by tempest and tempest by peace and the eternal combat between a higher and a lower self. (13.146) Small wonder, then, that serious musicians of his time were in turn admiring, bewildered and finally disgusted by his chameleon-like changes. They revered music and doubted Liszt's sincerity, concluding that his seeming devotion to the art was in fact a pretence. His triumphant concert tours gave rise to criticism by sober-minded musicians like Mendelssohn, Schumann and Chopin, who saw in his personality a poseur, trickster even.

As to his audiences, as slated by Wagner, they wanted only the bright and trivial, the physical pyrotechniques, the visual titillation. As an example, the poor musical taste of his Italian listeners depressed Liszt. Audiences at the famous Scala of Milan were addicted to superficial glitter and wanted only showy pianistic operatic transcriptions. Once he began playing one of his Etudes, but a voice shouted in true Italian fashion:-

"We came to the theatre to enjoy ourselves,
not to learn!" (17.64)

Yet Liszt loved the Italians and their country and forgave them their failings because they were true music-lovers.

"The waiter who froths your chocolate tells
you that Francilla Pixis sang the rondo in the
Cenerentola very well. The man who shines
your shoes isn't satisfied with the ornamentation
of Giuramento." (19.182)

Liszt's ascendancy over Italian audiences fed his ambitions and brought out the worst in his nature. He began to dress foppishly. The Ingres drawing of a handsome young Jandy made in Rome 1839 gives

witness to this. In Italy Liszt also learned to live beyond his means. (19.182)

Nor did such hero-worship of his virtuosity stop with Italy. When Liszt decided to extend his concert tours to Budapest during his pianistic career, he was a national hero before he had played a note. His return was a political event of the first magnitude, as Hungarian Nationalism was in the ascent.⁽¹⁾ He received a wildly enthusiastic welcome and on arrival was serenaded by a 60-voice choir and a military band. He had to go onto the balcony to be applauded. At one elite banquet, a subscription was proposed for a bust of Liszt. In ten minutes 1500 francs had been offered. He was also presented with the sword of honour after a concert given in the theatre. When he went home after the occasion, it was at the head of a torch-light procession with a military band at its head. There were even plans afoot to grant him the rank of nobility!

Liszt's triumphant reunion with his countrymen brought out the worst of his national characteristics; in place of the courage, the vanity; not the elegiac sadness evoked in the best poets of a mournful land, but the love for display and the snobbishness that are the by-products of feudal societies. (19.215) For the concert mentioned above, Liszt wore an expensive Hungarian costume costing 1000 francs. (22.88) The sword presented to him caused an outcry in France. The *Revue des Deux Mondes* sneered:-

"We let Beethoven and Weber die of hunger to give a sword of honour to M. Liszt." (19.216)

Even those who felt more kindly disposed towards him, found the sword amusing. One wit wrote:-

"Liszt alone of all the warriors is without reproach, for in spite of his big sword, we know that this has vanquished only semiquavers and slain only pianos." (14.154)

The unfortunate sword featured prominently in caricatures of Liszt.

(1) His playing of the rousing Rakoczy March was banned for fear it would provoke a mob uprising.

He was, if anything, even more popular with Berlin audiences. Their adulation was nothing short of Lisztmania. Women admirers collected his cigar-ends and carried phials into which they poured the dregs of his coffee and the water in which he had dipped his wonderful hands. His portrait was in every shop window and was worn on brooches and cameos. At his concerts impressionable ladies fainted or would fight over the gloves he negligently tossed onto the stage. The emotionally charged atmosphere of his recitals made them more like seances than musical events.

Liszt was also a willing collaborator in the spectacle the public chose to make of him. When he left Berlin after his concerts there, he was driven to the Brandenburg gate in a fine coach pulled by six white horses with 30 other carriages, each pulled by four horses, following in procession. An escort of students followed in their wake for several miles. Walker tells us that the Schumanns looked on, appalled. (30.163)

His tours extended from England, where he was invited to play for the queen and described by one newspaper as 'some giant, some tiger-tamer, some new Niagra, some winged being' (22.100), through Europe up to Copenhagen and down to Spain, Portugal and even Turkey. Russia, too, was an appreciative and permanent audience where Liszt attracted large crowds, tumultuous applause and great wealth and was to return again and again during his virtuoso years. Liszt could easily have contented himself with concert tours of Germany, Austria and France, but some strange impulse drove him from one country to another. Wherever he went he was wildly acclaimed. There was never a painter, writer or actor with such universal fame. Unmarried, the father of three children, having a scandalous liaison first with the Countess Marie d'Agoult and then with Princess Carolyne, his morals often met with disapproval; his pride and showmanship were deplored, but as a performer he was acknowledged to be without parallel.

His personal indulgences (including a luxurious travelling coach), extravagant clothes, excessive vanity, train of camp followers who trailed after him from one place to another and the spectacle he made of his art began to discredit him. Admirers such as Schumann

felt repulsion that so great a gift be put to such base purposes and were distressed that he had become dazzled by his own myth. Clara Schumann later referred to Liszt as being a smasher of pianos. (30.163) They came to agree with Mendelssohn's diagnosis of his character as 'a continual alternation between scandal and apotheosis.' (30.163) Liszt's way of life caused him to run into German and Anglo-Saxon prejudices that led to the opinion held to this day that he was flashy and a fraud, if not an outright charlatan. The German outlook was one of innocence opposed to worldliness; sentiment to passion; His affaire with the Countess d'Agoult was, in their eyes, unpardonable. Wagner wrote in his essay 'Traps for unwary Germans in Paris':-

"Above all, the German's reputation for neediness saves him from offending against his inborn morality and he is simply not in a position to keep mistresses. Parisians of all kinds have mistresses. This excellent custom is naturally distasteful to Germans ... but it is precisely their lack of mistresses that cuts Germans so completely off from Parisian society."
(14.22/23)

Yet even in Paris, when Liszt returned to challenge Thalberg, he was initially given a chilly reception, but the quality of his playing had improved while he was away and he was soon enthusiastically received. But his general reputation never really recovered from the seven years of his virtuoso career. There is no doubt that it was during these years that all the cheap and vulgar traits that the Countess tried to suppress and which one half of his nature heartily despised, reached their fullest flowering. Liszt tried to explain to her his need to enslave his audiences. When he returned to Paris, the Countess stayed at Nohant, the home of George Sand. Liszt pleaded with her to join him:-

"Come, and come soon and understand and love me. What makes me stay here is the need to fight against the stupid mob, to conquer one by one the difficulties that hinder the development of my personality." (19.162)

Admiration and Flattery were not, however, confined only to his

audiences. Gall, phrenologist, took a cast of his skull; Talma, tragedian, clasped him to his breast; Count d'Orsay painted his portrait. The mother of one of his students in his early Paris years wrote in her journal that everything Liszt said was 'luminous, daring, striking, powerful, full of profound truth.' (19.18) Even Princess Carolyne, who knew Liszt well, kept 14 busts of him in her drawingroom long after the romance had faded from their relationship. In such an atmosphere it is small wonder that the man grew addicted to the praise and attention lavished upon him. He responded to it with his whole being, acting the part of spoiled virtuoso both on and off-stage. The influence of the glaring publicity in which he moved encouraged development of the bravura self that came too easily to him. Some of his biographers attribute his great vanity to his Hungarian origin. Whatever the cause, he was unquestionably vain. He had an egotistical passion for applause and sought to please his audiences at whatever cost and used every means at his disposal, musical or otherwise, to captivate them. His looks were a decided advantage. Tall and slender, he had refined features and beautiful hands. (20.30/31) When he started his career as a concert pianist, he wore his hair fashionably below the ears, but later was to wear it falling to his shoulders. In addition, he cultivated the manners and bearing of a noble, to the point where he was always so naturally gracious and well-mannered that Prince Karl Alexander once remarked to Busoni that Liszt was what a prince ought to be. (22.209) We also have a report by Amy Fay, an American student at Weimar, given in her book 'Music Study in Germany':-

"When he got up to leave the box (at a concert), for instance after his adieux to the ladies, he laid his hand on his heart and made his final bow - not with affectation or in mere gallantry, but with a quiet courtliness which made you feel that no other way of bowing to a lady was right or proper." (22.267)

Liszt was not above drawing attention to his looks in every way possible. He dressed elegantly and from the time he first visited Hungary, astonished audiences with a wardrobe of Hungarian clothes. He also kept a vast collection of gloves and cravats and made a

habit of wearing the various orders awarded him suspended on his person by chains. Even the bejewelled sword given to him in Budapest was strapped around his waist and worn with aplomb on concert platforms. A well-known Russian critic described Liszt's appearance at his first St. Petersburg concert:-

"Liszt, also, wore a white cravat and over it the Golden Spur given him by Pius IX. He was further adorned by various other orders suspended by chains from the lapels of his dress-coat. But that which struck the Russians most was the great mane of fair hair reaching almost to his shoulders." (22.105)

He was so immersed in his actor's role that he seemed unable to shed himself of it even on holiday. When he and Countess Marie visited Chamonix with Pictet and George Sand, they caused a stir. Liszt with his long hair, George Sand in her masculine attire of dungaree-like trousers and Pictet in his Federal Army Officer's uniform intrigued the local residents. Countess Marie, ever the lady, was the only conventionally dressed member of the party and her neat, attractive appearance only served to emphasize the oddity of theirs. The hotel guests were kept awake well into the night by the singing and general raucousness of Liszt's high-spirited party. The visit certainly impressed itself upon the memory of George Sand and Pictet, for both later wrote about it. Sand gives this account:-

"The maid was aghast to see a lad, (Sand), whom she had mistaken for a stable-boy in his mud-splashed clothes, embrace a beautiful lady like Arabella, (Sand's name for Countess Marie.) So she dropped her candle and went to inform the management that Room 13 had been invaded by a mysterious and indescribable gang of people who had long hair like savages and that it was impossible to tell man from woman and master from servant." (17.59)

In old age it pleased Liszt to wear priest's clothes and look like a wizzard. Although at that stage he no longer performed for personal gain, he played for his students, for friends and for special occasions

and it seemed to give his sardonic amusement to wear his priest's robe.⁽²⁾ In his final role of priest, the part Liszt chose for himself was active resignation. When in Rome, he immersed himself in a spiritual existence which nevertheless made provision for his composing activities. He Villa d'Este provided a quiet, contemplative life that resulted in many sincerely devout religious works. Yet even then he had to return to the public eye for part of each year. His sojourns in Weimar and Budapest provided opportunities for a less spartan way of life and served to highlight his absence in Rome for the rest of the time. When he returned to Weimar each year, he was warmly welcomed. A comfortable house was put at his disposal. Here he received pupils and leading musicians of the time. Liszt made a strong impression on his Weimar students. While the females adored him, the males copied him. Grieg, when taking his piano concerto to Liszt, noticed a German Lisztite 'whose name I do not know, but who goes so far in the aping of his idol that he even wears the gown of an abbe.' (22.266)

Liszt's personality was another factor which helped make a showman of him. He was intelligent and witty, with a dry humour that audiences found endearing. When touring Italy, his audiences, in response to his request for themes for improvisation, came forward with humorous suggestions such as an improvisation on Milan cathedral, the newly invented railway and the question whether it was better to remain a bachelor. Liszt was quite unperturbed by these unusual requests and in reply to the last, commented:-

"As I could only have answered this query by a long pause, I preferred to recall to the audience the words of a sage - whichever conclusion you may come to, whether to marry or remain single, you will always repent it." (22.4)

His sardonic humour is also apparent in the comments made to a sculptor, who in the interests of realism, had included an entire concert grand in his work. When he saw it, Liszt remarked:-

(2) In 1879 he received the only church promotion ever accorded him - Canon of Albano. He could now wear, if he chose, a purple soutane. (22.279) It seems surprising that he never did so!

"Thus shall I appear to posterity. You represent me as playing a musical coffin. I shall be seen hanging by my nails to this funeral box."

The sculptor smiled and said he could substitute an upright.

"Then I would seem to be scratching a mummy case ... they will take me for an Egyptologist engaged on some sacriligious work!" (22.114)

On another occasion, Princess Belgiojoso, good pianist but poor accompanist because she took great liberties with the time, incurred the displeasure of a young German tenor, who complained loudly:-

"Il n'y a pas de tact, il n'y a pas de tact"

thinking that the German word 'takt' meant the same in French. Liszt gently corrected him, saying:-

"Monsieur, Madame la Princess manque de mesure mais vous manquez de tact!" (15.106)

Liszt's ability to express himself in a few well-chosen words is aptly illustrated in his dry comment to a student in Weimar, Amy Fay, who was wriggling through a passage.

"Keep your hand still, Fräulein, don't make omelette!" (12.190)

Biographer Perenyi states that Liszt comes down to us in the guise of a charlatan, supreme poseur, when he was nothing so simple.

"Being nobody, it is necessary to become somebody" he told the Countess. (19.3)

Schonberg put it aptly when he wrote:-

"Look at him one way and he was a genius; look at him another and he was a poseur. But one had to look - from the moment he broke upon the world he could not be ignored." (20.191)

Sitwell maintained:-

"But it was no more fair to accuse him of being a charlatan than to lay this charge against some great actor, for his genius was essentially histrionic in character." (22.114)

He had become a legend of the concert platform during his own lifetime and was the not unwilling centre of his own smoke-screen. His pretentiousness, together with his flashy performance of the simpler, more popular pieces, mesmerised audiences and by so doing, he enraged other musicians. Some of the criticism of the less-talented may well have arisen from jealousy, but the dismay of proven musicians was genuine as they felt that Liszt was degrading their art. Yet even while they decried the flamboyant actor in Liszt, there were some, at least, who acknowledged that without it he would have been a lesser artist. Schumann said:-

"I have heard him play before; but it is one thing when the artist is playing before a public and another when he is playing before a small group - even the artist himself changes. The beautiful, illuminated hall, the glow of candle-light, the handsomely dressed audience - all this tends to elevate the frame of mind of the giver as well as that of the receiver. And now the daemon began to stir in him; first he played with the public, as if to try it, then gave it something more profound until he had enmeshed every member of the audience with his art and did with them as he willed. With the exception of Paganini, no artist to a like degree possesses this power of subjecting the public, of lifting it, sustaining it and letting it fall again ... but he must be heard ... and also seen - for if Liszt played behind a screen a great deal of poetry would be lost." (18.156)

(my underlining)

and

"But what is most difficult is, precisely to talk about this art. It is no longer pianoforte playing of this kind or that; instead it is generally the outward expression of a daring character whom fortune has permitted to dominate and to triumph, not with dangerous implements, but with the peaceful means of art. No matter how many important artists have passed before

us in the last years; no matter how many artists equalling Liszt in many respects we ourselves possess, not one can match him in point of energy and boldness." (18.157)

In a letter to Dionys Pruckner in Vienna, written from Weimar on 11 February 1858, Liszt explained his own attitude to performing in public:-

"... in private, throughout our lives, we must study, reflect, bring our work to maturity and come as near as we can to the ideal in art. But when we enter the concert hall, we must never lose the feeling that this conscientious, serious striving has raised us a little above the audience and that we have to represent our share of human dignity, as Schiller puts it. Do not be led astray by false modesty, but let us hold fast to the genuine kind; which is far more difficult to preserve and more rarely found. The artist, in our sense, should be neither servant of the audience nor its master. He is and remains the representative of beauty, in all the inexhaustible multiplicity of which man's thought and feeling are capable - and his unflinching conviction of this is sufficient warrant for him." (9.217)

These sentiments seem sincere. Liszt was a showman, without doubt, but a charlatan? Hardly! A charlatan above all promotes his own interests by exploiting the ignorance or innocence of others. Liszt was too much of a humanitarian to do so and indeed, was known for his generosity and thoughtfulness. He did not take advantage even of those who would have been willing victims. During his relationship with the Countess d'Agoult he must have been tempted, in the early days as a virtuoso, to put her on display or arrange visits from her friends who could have helped his career, but he never did so. In this same vein, Liszt did not once accept financial help from the Princess Carolyne even when he found himself in straitened circumstances after retiring from the concert platform - and feeling as she did about him it was surely proffered. Instead, one finds constant references to his giving financial aid to others, even when he could scarcely afford it. At a time when his only source of income was published compositions, he was supporting his children

and an aging mother in Paris, yet gave money freely to various causes. Nor was his help confined to musicians. Felix von Lichnowsky was one of many who borrowed from him, and in Wagner's autobiography there is an entry -

"Liszt took him (Baudelaire) everywhere where there was a chance of making some money, but I couldn't find out whether he was able to help him." (17.154)

In his last years, particularly, Liszt suffered a shortage of money as he would not accept fees from his pupils and had virtually no income. One reads of his travelling by second class railway, unable to afford greater luxury, compelled to sit up all night, (22,250) and his delight in a new tramway to Tivoli, Italy, which absolved him from a four-hour drive in public diligence from Piazza di Spagna to the Villa d'Este. (22.277) This was the same man, who, a few years before, had owned a luxury coach - and, had he wished to, could have done so again by resuming a career as virtuoso pianist. He chose not to. He also spent years of his life helping people who held him in low esteem or were jealous of him. He did much to help the Schumanns, who later turned on him; Von Bulow, who deserted him for Wagner; and Berlioz, particularly, by publicizing his compositions in the piano transcriptions and through active support by attending performances of his works. Berlioz mentioned one of his concerts on December 5 1830 which Liszt patronised:-

"He was present at the concert and excited attention by his applause and enthusiasm." (19.68)

Yet Berlioz, too, estranged himself from Liszt because of his championship of the music of Wagner.

In old age his consideration for other people still held:-

"People ought to scold me," he wrote. "I make no excuses. My aversion to answering letters has become an obsession. But how can I answer 2000 letters a year without becoming a lunatic?"

Yet he did answer most of them, and fully. (17.220)

Even the impulse which drove him to the concert platform in 1839 was born of his charitable inclinations. While in San Rossore to escape the summer heat, Liszt was angered to find that the Beethoven Memorial Committee in Bonn had abandoned plans to raise funds for a Beethoven monument because of poor support. Rather than see the scheme collapse, for he idolized Beethoven, he offered to take it on himself, arranging for Bartolini, best sculptor in Italy, to sculpt a monument in marble, and he, Liszt, undertook to pay from his own pocket the sum still outstanding. He now had to return to the concert platform to raise the money. While this may well have been a heaven-sent opportunity to escape the Countess d'Agoult's restrictive influence and do what he most wanted to, the greatness of the task and the length of time involved for this unrewarded labour must have involved deep feeling on his part to take such a weighty task upon himself. When the statue was unveiled in 1845, he wrote a special cantata for the event and played Beethoven's E flat concerto, adhering scrupulously to the score. Sir Charles Halle tells us that a finer and grander reading of the work could not be imagined. (15.103)

Liszt, too, was a person of furious energy. Sir Charles Halle said of him:-

"This curious figure is in perpetual motion; now he stamps his feet, now waves his arms in the air, now does this, now that." (15.75)

Such vitality is the well-spring of enthusiasm and is an attractive personality trait. Yet this very quality constituted problems for Liszt in that many pianos of that time were delicate instruments unable to cope with the onslaught of his more vigorous works. They lacked the modern iron frame of today and Liszt sometimes left a trail of broken strings and debris behind him. While many members of his audiences enjoyed the spectacle, there were those who were not amused. Public performances at London's Royal Philharmonic Concerts earned severe criticism:-

"Liszt has been presented by the Royal Philharmonic Society with an elegant silver breakfast service

for doing that which would cause every young student to receive a severe reprimand - viz. thumping and partially destroying two very fine pianofortes." (22.99)

Others seemed mesmerised at the sight. A poet named Saphir wrote:-

"An inexplicable apparition ... after the concert the victorious chief remains master of the field of battle ... the conquered pianos lie scattered around him, broken strings float like trophies, wounded instruments flee in all directions, the audience look at one another, dumb with surprise as after a sudden storm in a serene sky. And he, the Prometheus, who with each note has forged a being, his head bent, smiles strangely before this crowd that applauds him madly."
(5.133 and 12.151)

Yet we have the other side of the coin too. In encouraging a feeble student to a more bold approach, Liszt said:-

"When I play, I always play for the people in the gallery ... so that those persons who pay only 5 groschen for their seat also hear something."
(12.190)

Once again we find that strange ambiguity in Liszt - self-promotion coupled with a surprising consideration for the needs of others. This same duality is also found in his attitude to playing on bad pianos. Where other performers would have refused to play on anything but the best instruments, he took positive delight in performing on inferior pianos, or those in need of tuning, as on these his outstanding musicianship was even more apparent. (19.56) One has to bear in mind, however, that Liszt, in travelling, played in all kinds of places - opera houses, public hotel rooms, halls of universities, embassies and palaces. Some of these venues were not equipped with good instruments and it says much for Liszt's good humour that he took the good with the bad with smiling serenity. When travelling the English Provinces with John Orlando Parry, the two travelled together as far as Ireland. At a concert near Cork, where the piano had been forgotten, Liszt used the hotel piano. Parry commented:-

"T'was like a private matinee - so funny to see Liszt firing away at Guillaume Tell on this little instrument." (19.211)

When performing, he poured so much nervous energy into his playing that the results were sometimes alarming. Henry Reeves described one such recital as follows:-

"... at the closing strains I saw Liszt's countenance assume that agony of expression, mingled with radiant smiles of joy, which I never saw in any other face except in the paintings of our Saviour by some of the early masters. His hands rushed over the keys, the floor on which I sat shook like wire and the whole audience were wrapped with sound, when the hand and frame of the artist gave way. He fainted in the arms of a friend who was turning the pages for him and we bore him out in a strong fit of hysterics." (22.30)

A mistake that was to brand Liszt as insincere, was his unbridled admiration for his friends who were artists and poets. For the most part, these were older men and so great was their prestige that it did not occur to Liszt to challenge them when they ventured on ground he knew more about than they, but accepted their opinion without question and promoted these as being his own. Those who loved him were concerned. Mme. Boissier, a friend from his youth, referred to him as 'basically a good child', but continued:-

"but the poor young man is horribly spoiled by the world and success ... he has had the ill-luck to live in a fashionable literary milieu that has fed him with its dangerous doctrines, its false ideas and its unbelief ... is involved with a highly immoral system that is wed to Saint Simonians on the one hand and to Mme. Dudevant (George Sand) on the other."

Later she mentions his

"verve, spirit, genius; a noble soul ... disinterested, very generous ... black and white, in fact, yet lovable." (19.130)

Pretending to knowledge he did not have aroused censure. For example,

when he and the Countess d'Agoult visited George Sand at Nohant, some of her guests disliked him. One said disparagingly:-

"He likes to play cards and always wants to win, and though he understands nothing, he likes to talk politics and will do anything to convince you that he is an accomplished diplomat." (19.169)

Yet in fairness, Liszt did try to remedy the gaps in his knowledge. He ventured on a course of self-education that must be unique for a musician. D'Ortique records that on a typical day he would read dictionaries for four consecutive hours and Boiste and Lamartine with the same ardour. He would corner people with questions both touching and ridiculous. 'Teach me the history of France', he said to Mignet. (19.41) This pursuit of intellectual knowledge struck many people as being another Liszt affectation, yet to him, nothing was more important than to know what God intended him to be ... a great artiste, yes, but of what kind? To find out, he investigated every movement in religious or philisophical thought available to him. Montalembert wrote to the Abbe de Lamennais in March 1833 after meeting Liszt:-

"I can't remember ever having met a more sincere enthusiasm." (19.102)

A strange facet of his personality that aroused cynicism in his critics was his inability to admit faults in himself that he saw so clearly in others. Of Paganini, he wrote:-

"Let the artist of the future renounce, then, with all his heart, the vain and egotistical role of which Paganini was, we think, a last and illustrious example. Let him fix his goal not in himself but outside himself; let virtuosity be to him a means not an end." (his underlining) (19.54)

Yet Paganini's vanity and egotism paled into insignificance beside Liszt's! On another occasion, in speaking of Wagner as being 'the focus of every high endeavour, high feeling and honest effort in art', Liszt continued:-

"This is my true conviction, without pedantry and charlatanism, both of which I hate." (3.314 Letter 124)

Could he really have been oblivious of the opinions of others that he, himself, was pedantic and a charlatan?

An aspect of his art which did him irreparable damage was his liking for Italian music, which led to his being accused of promoting what was worthless merely to enhance his image. His detractors were horrified by Italian opera - partly because of nationality and partly because so many northern composers died penniless and unappreciated while composers of 'trivial' Italian opera were affluent and this seemed an insult. (3) (22.67) What was overlooked was that Liszt was not blind to the faults of the Italians. He had boldly criticized Italian musical taste in some articles in the Gazette Musicale in Paris, and when he first went to Italy on his concert tours, was in disfavour with the Italians and only recaptured their admiration through his superb playing. With his musical appetite, he could not, however, help but be aware of the merit to be found in Italian opera and exploited this in his operatic transcriptions. Transcriptions were not something new introduced by Liszt. It was an art much practised in the 19th century to equip musicians with a practical way of becoming acquainted with symphonies and operas and also to provide concert pianists with a brilliant type of arrangement to the taste of the public. Fantasias upon popular melodies formed the performer's main showpiece. (5.103) What was different was that Liszt's transcriptions were not only vehicles of display for his phenomenal technique, but also for his personality and helped create the illusion of his being a man apart. They far outstripped those of his rivals in their brilliance and originality. His operatic paraphrases were music for super-virtuosos only. The Bach transcriptions were criticized with some justification, as they contained vulgar and hideous additions, only reinforcing the opinion of his detractors that Liszt's transcriptions were regrettable transgressions against music and that he was a fraud. This applied also to many

(3) Musicians outside Germany felt differently - both Chopin and Tchaikowsky greatly admired the operas of Bellini.

of his fantasia-transcriptions based on other composers' themes, where Liszt so embellished the piece that it was scarcely recognisable. He allowed himself to be carried away by inspiration and took liberties with its accuracy. He would transpose simple passages into octaves and thirds, trills into sixths and add phrases of his own until, to quote Borodin, 'what appeared was not the same piece but an improvisation on it.' (19.205) Many of his Beethoven and Schubert transcriptions had been altered in this way and were harshly criticized. Chopin was scathing in his attack on Liszt:-

"When I think of Liszt as a creative artist, he appears before my eyes rouged, on stilts and blowing into Jericho trumpets fortissimo and pianissimo - or I see him discoursing on art, on the nature of creativeness and how one should create. Yet as a creator, he is an ass ... he is an excellent binder who puts other people's works between his covers ... I still say he is a clever craftsman without a vestige of talent." (12.150 and 5.87)

Even those who admired Liszt could not condone his alterations to the works of other composers. Sir Charles Halle was more gentle in his reprimand - but reprimand it was:-

"There were some peculiarities of style or rather of musicianship which could not be approved ... he was fond of playing in public his arrangement for piano of the Scherzo, the Storm and the Finale of Beethoven's Pastorale Symphony. The Storm was magnificent, but he played the first eight bars of the Scherzo quicker than they are usually taken and the next eight bars in a slow andante." (15.58)

Hiller also objected violently to the liberties taken and said that after the first try, most compositions did not give Liszt 'enough to do. (19.205)

There is no denying that Liszt was great at the art of showmanship. It was this that attracted disparaging comments such as the one made by Cornelius:-

"With Liszt one is always uneasily conscious

of the mask he puts on for the world. Yet he wants himself and again himself, no doubt about that ... God preserve us from having genius." (19.296)

When Liszt ended his virtuoso career for the modest Weimar appointment, many of his detractors were confounded. It was totally at odds with their image of him as a self-seeker. When he entered the church, all the old mistrust was reborn. Was this not merely another guise? And what a setting he had chosen for himself ... he could not have picked a better one to set all the tongues of Europe wagging. Even sympathetic modern biographers question the sincerity of Liszt's taking holy orders. In his Abbe's robe, he knew he presented an intriguing figure, especially when he performed, which he did even as late as his last visit to London, though only for small private audiences such as that at Westwood House, where he was a guest.

Bence Szabolcsi describes Liszt accurately when he says:-

"A man who, even after having ostentatiously donned clerical garments and undertaken to add the service of the church to his social duties, knew how to drain the cup of his triumphs to the last drop." (24.6)

But success like his simply could not be had through deliberate fraud. Liszt could not have achieved his colossal celebrity through mere deception. He did indeed take his art seriously. Even in the much maligned transcriptions evidence of his genius can be found. Wagner said of Liszt:-

"This wonderful man can do or undertake nothing without producing his own self from his inner fulness. He can never be merely reproductive; no other action than the purely productive is possible to him; all in him tends to be absolute, pure production ..." (3. Letter 18)

Saint-Saëns agreed, as seen from the following:-

"Liszt knew how to draw the marrow from any bone; he knew how to discover and fructify an artistic germ, however hidden under vulgarities and platitudes." (25.232)

Biographer Ernest Newman sees in the transcriptions evidence of:-

"The possessor of a thoroughly musical imagination
- the imagination not only of the performer,
but of the creator." (25.246)

Busoni supported Liszt by asking why, if it was right and proper for any classical composer to write variations on a theme from an opera by a selected composer, was it wrong for Liszt to do the same thing but call it Reminiscences or Paraphrase or Fantasia? (16.170)

While many of his transcriptions alter the original material so greatly that it is hardly recognizable, he seems to have regarded most of those of the Beethoven symphonies in the nature of engravings after famous paintings - he saw himself in the role of skilled translator and suppressed his own immense creative impulses in the interests of authenticity. These transcriptions made available works for study - works which were by no means known to all; rarely heard in the concert hall, and because radios and record-players were still inventions of the future, never in the home. Beethoven was not popular in all circles in Paris and Liszt was, in fact, doing the same kind of pioneering for him as he had undertaken for Berlioz. (21.36)

Liszt not only played the transcriptions of Berlioz's Symphony Fantastique at his own concerts, but actually bore the expense of its publication so that it could reach as wide a population as possible. (21.8) Others he helped through transcribing their works for piano were Glinka, Gounod, Saint-Saëns, Cui, Dargomijsky and, of course, Wagner. Many transcriptions were also for the benefit of young and comparatively unknown composers to whom his name on the cover of their pieces would be of great help. (21.9) His skill and taste in 'engraving' other men's work was impeccable. His arrangements of the Schubert songs are applauded even by 'severe critics of his music as being an invaluable contribution. He exercised particular care and restraint with these songs and his pianistic technicalities are subservient to their directness and simplicity.

There was even merit to be found in his Bach transcriptions, distorted though they were, in that those of the Preludes and Fugues mark the beginning of the cult for Bach, whose rediscovery was chiefly

due to Mendelssohn and Liszt. His operatic transcriptions received the most abuse - yet even here, many were tastefully done. Those of the Rossini operas are among the best and one biographer at least feels that they have died an undeserved death. (27.69) In many of the operatic fantasias, Liszt completely transcended his original material and produced a kind of re-creation of thoughts of the composers which raises them to a far higher musical level. Had he concentrated more on transcribing the works of past musicians, his works might have been given a more favourable reception. His attitude is well summed up in his reply to a French society asking him to transcribe a piece by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. After gracefully declining, he explained that while not lacking respect for his musical ancestors, he had devoted all his energies to their modern descendants. (22.316)

Even those transcriptions which lacked any real musical value are excused by Searle on the grounds that:-

"Liszt certainly did not write them with his tongue in his cheek and if the result is often superficial, this merely means that these operas aroused no deep creative imagination in him."
(21.35)

Liszt's gifts as a pianist were widely acknowledged, but the regrettable outcome of the visual impact of his art was that so many of his compositions were underestimated because he was labelled a musical dilettante. His excessively difficult Paganini etudes were much condemned. Schumann and Brahms were also so taken with Paganini that they, too, were inspired to compose works based on his themes. Schumann's etudes, published in 1833, are highly romanticized, while Liszt's, completed as early as 1834 but with the revised edition only appearing in 1851, are realistic and ruthless. Brahms took a different approach, using a theme of Paganini's capricci for 28 variations, as tremendously difficult as the Liszt set, but quite different and published only in 1866. (22.54) He and Schumann escaped censure - Liszt did not!

His B minor sonata suffered the same fate. It was an intensely personal work. This very fact outlawed it in the ranks of classically inclined composers like Brahms. He heard it first as a young man,

when he visited Liszt, who, after praising the work Brahms had brought with him, sat down at the piano and played his B minor sonata. Half-way through he noticed that the rude young Brahms had dropped off to sleep, quietly closed the piano and left the room. Many years later Brahms was to write to Clara Schumann:-

"An enthusiastic article appeared on Liszt's sonata in the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, evoked, as I imagine, by an experiment in magnetism!"
(17.143)

Yet we can seldom find a more spontaneous outpouring, a truer self-portrait than Liszt has given here. Kentner finds in it a reflection of Liszt's absorption with Goethe's Faust, saying the three principal characters - Faust, Marguerite and Mephistopheles - are all integral parts of Liszt's character and that the B minor sonata is a Faust sonata; it contains the tortured brooding of Faust, purity and innocence of Marguerite, elegant maliciousness of Mephistopheles.
(16.171) Beckett says:-

"The very breath of his soul is in the hesitant opening, where he seems to be searching with a typical sincerity and humility for the path that will lead him to the sublime." (5.84)

Published in 1854, Liszt attempted in this sonata to break the bonds of sonata form, but never followed it up. It met with such abuse that it remains an isolated work.

Among his Paris friends were Chopin, George Sand, Berlioz, Delacroix and Heine. They would meet for musical evenings which would end with Liszt playing for them. On private occasions of this kind, he played anything and everything. When playing to his friends, he would perform the music of other composers without adornment, simply and sincerely but, for the public, he would play showy pieces such as the improvisations on Bulhakov's 'Russischer Galopp' and Conradi's 'Zigeuner Polka', both totally devoid of artistic merit. Liszt was later very much aware of the bad impression caused by his poor choice of pieces and the alteration and embellishment of other composers' works in his concerts. Discussing his concert

programmes in a letter to J. W. Wasielewski, written in Weimar on 9 January 1857, Liszt wrote:-

"... which, partly from lack of time and partly from indolence and weariness of my pianistic 'golden age', I seldom drew up myself, just leaving the choice of pieces to one person or another. This was a mistake I recognised and sincerely regretted later on, when I had come to perceive that for any artist who wishes to be worthy of the name, the danger of displeasing the public is of far less significance than that of allowing himself to be swayed by their whims - and this danger is particularly likely to overtake the practising artist unless he has the courage to make a firm principle of standing up seriously and consistently for his own convictions and performing what he recognises to be the best things, whether people like it or not ... the force of habit and the slavish conditions of the artist who depends upon the encouragement and applause of the masses for the maintenance and improvement of his existence and reputation, are so binding that even the better-intentioned and most courageous, of whom I am proud to account myself one, find it extremely hard to protect their better selves from the cheerful, muddle-headed and - despite their number - unaccountable mob." (9.216/217)

Liszt continued to lead the wandering restless life of a virtuoso until its false splendours palled. His abrupt retirement at the age of 36 in 1848 was unexpected and irrevocable. He explained once to Hanslick, 'Virtuosity requires youth'. (11.110) The effect of his early retirement at the height of fame was undoubtedly what he intended it to be - instead of plunging him into oblivion, it fixed forever the Liszt legend in the public mind. Yet one cannot doubt that he had become disgusted with the superficial life, not to mention the loneliness, of a public idol. A letter of 1837 refers to the time of his father's death in 1827 and shows his first disgust at the shallowness of a performer's life:-

"When death robbed me of my father, I began to foresee what art might be and what it must be ... having no sympathetic word from ... artists, who unlike myself were slumbering in comfortable indifference knowing nothing of the aims I had in view ... there came over me a bitter disgust against art such as it appeared to me, vilified

and degraded to the level of a more or less profitable handicraft, branded as a source of amusement for distinguished society. I felt I would sooner be anything in the world than a musician in the pay of the exalted, patronised and salaried by them like a conjuror, or the learned dog Munito ..." (5.23 and 19.17)

In a letter to Countess Marie d'Agoult in 1842, he wrote:-

"My life for the last three years has been nothing but a series of excitements ... leading to disgust and remorse. I must spend and spend again ... life, strength, money and time, without joy in the present or hope in the future ... my health is iron ..." (19.236)

Yet this way of life was to continue for another six years, with growing disillusionment. Countess Marie assessed the situation accurately when she wrote of Liszt in her memoirs:-

"Drawn as he was in opposite directions, he sought, in order to escape from himself, distraction in the outer world, whence I used to see him return more and more dissatisfied, more and more out of equilibrium." (4.89)

Finally Liszt retired from the concert stage, although, being a born actor, he continued to live the part of Romantic Hero until the last. He would doubtless have been a happier man if he could have contented himself with that, and only that, but side-by-side with his love of attention, was a deep and sincere love for music and one can only applaud the courageous act of the man who eventually put music first and self into the background. His art he regarded almost as a mystical experience - he felt for it a devotion akin to a religious impulse. (5.7)

The duality between showmanship and musicianship was inherent from the start. Even the people who influenced Liszt most in captivating audiences were only esteemed by him because they were also first-class musicians. He was as much impressed by Paganini's sheer musical genius as by his manner of performance; moved to extend his own musical horizons as well as to promote himself as a performer.

In a letter to a pupil in 1832, he wrote, after hearing Paganini:-

"'And I, too, am a painter', cried Michelangelo the first time he saw a masterpiece ... though small and poor your friend has been repeating those words of a great man ever since Paganini's last concert." (19.43)

The awe and reverence he felt for Paganini's art emerged strongly at Paganini's death in 1860. The church withheld the last rites and refused to bury him in consecrated ground. Eventually he was buried in the grounds of the estate of an aristocratic friend. Later he was exhumed and reburied several times. Forty years later he was permanently reburied at Parma with Vatican approval. Liszt's voice, at the time of Paganini's death, was raised hotly in defence of his fellow-musician, to the point of publishing a moving obituary notice; compassionate and a magnificent tribute from one great artist to another.

His admiration for Berlioz was firmly founded on his belief in the man's genius. His delight in the *Symphonie Fantastique* is evident through his masterly transcription for the piano. He took three years transcribing Berlioz's works, including *Harold in Italy*, several overtures and *Lelio*. He was intrigued by Berlioz's novel orchestral treatment, rhythm and melody and undertook the transcriptions mostly to help his friend get a hearing as he was convinced of Berlioz's artistic worth. The public that had to be coaxed to a Berlioz symphonic programme flocked to hear Liszt play the same music on the piano - which he did solely to promote Berlioz's works. Much as he loved Wagner, both as a friend and musician, he stood firm against him over Berlioz; (neither liked nor understood the other), which led to coldness between Liszt and Wagner. He refused to feature Wagner's works only at Weimar, to the exclusion of Berlioz's.

While Liszt was loudly condemned for his showmanship, much of this was allied to the fact that musicians were regarded in a poor light and he was determined to raise their status in the eyes of the public. His very first boyhood love affair with a teenage student in Paris, Caroline Saint Cricq, was terminated abruptly by her father, who

was appalled at the idea of his daughter's involvement with a mere musician. It was such an innocent relationship - they read together romances and poetry, Hugo, Dante, etc. Liszt was so upset when the friendship ended that he suffered a nervous breakdown. The poor opinion held of musicians was thus indelibly imprinted on his mind - and was to be reinforced throughout the years. During his English visits, people who were won over by his personality expressed regret that he was a pianist. In Italy, we learn from Liszt's letters that composers were regarded in the same light as singers and were made to take boos or cheers on the stage. (19.181) Even in his personal life, the inferior opinion of musicians was impressed on him. Much as Countess Marie d'Agoult loved him, she let him know that she was lowering herself by living with him and decried his virtuoso career at every opportunity. Even with Princess Carolyne, who worshipped him devotedly, he was indirectly insulted by people like Bernadi, who described Carolyne in the most unflattering terms simply because she lived with Liszt and he felt she had betrayed her class by taking up with a musician.

Art for Liszt was a duty and a mission with social significance. For the Mozart Centenary Celebrations he wrote that Mozart's undying merit was to make music a part of social life, of intellectual development. (17.130) He set out to win social acceptance by the nobility, partly, no doubt, for his own sake, but also to promote the profession of musicians. He himself assumed the manners and bearing of a noble and dressed and acted accordingly. One should remember that because he insisted on acceptance into their ranks, the lot of later musicians was made easier. His detractors should also concede that Liszt accepted the resultant responsibilities gracefully. He was a living personification of his own description of the true artist: 'Génie oblige' (17.238) He took every opportunity to promote musicians, sometimes at the risk of incurring displeasure, as on the occasion when Tsar Nicholas spoke during one of his recitals. Liszt immediately stopped playing. When the Tsar enquired the reason, Liszt replied sarcastically: 'Music herself should be silent when Nicholas speaks!' (27.49) It took courage indeed to correct a monarch. He was performing a universal service with these social clashes as conditions altered to a large extent as a result of them.

Liszt wore the many decorations awarded him not only through vanity, but also to show the world at large that here was a musician who was highly regarded, who had earned the respect of kings, nobles and governments. He used the press to educate the public, as in his article 'The Standing of the Modern Musician' of 1854, when he wrote:-

"In our time we have not yet ceased viewing musicians as rare, curious phenomena, half-angels, half-donkeys, who bring heavenly songs to mortals but who, at the same time, in their day to day life, are to be treated in the most ambiguous manner or with the most unambiguous scorn."
(18.167)

He never did succeed wholly in this mission, but disillusioned though he must have been, set about serving music as best he could - and helping musicians everywhere. Only someone who felt seriously about music would have devoted the time and energy that Liszt expended. From the time he retired from the concert platform he worked ceaselessly for the benefit of other musicians.

Liszt turned Weimar into a unique workshop, the only place where new music, neglected music, 'difficult' music, could regularly be heard. His letters of 1846 to Karl Alexander, Weimar's young Crown Prince, express his determination to make Weimar his venue. 'The city ... which has given me such a serene and serious consciousness of my future.' (19.285) Being devoted to music of the future, he wished to place Weimar in the vanguard of modern music. He helped all who appealed to him in this cause, even where his own preferences differed. He believed that music could be fertilized by other arts and popularised the concept of programme music as an expression of the mood of a poem or painting transmuted into a musical experience. He felt so strongly about music progressing in new directions that he wrote from Weimar on 9 January 1857 to J. W. von Wasielewski in Dresden:-

"In matters of art there is one pernicious sin of which most of us are guilty, owing to our negligence and fickleness; I will call it 'the sin of Pilate'. In following the classics and playing the classics, which has been the

fashion for some years now and may be regarded in general as an improvement of our musical condition, many of us conceal this sin without compensating for it - much could be said on this subject, but it would lead me too far ..."
(216/217)

And, to student Agnes Klindworth not long after his resignation from Weimar:-

"The idea of its (music's) more free development, more adequate, so to speak, to the spirit of our times, has always kept me fascinated ... if, since I fixed myself here in 1848 I had wished to attach myself back to the posthumous side of music, to associate myself with its hypocrisy, to keep on good terms with its prejudices, nothing would have been more easy for me considering my liaisons with the 'big-wigs' of that body. I should certainly have gained in worldly consideration and in the niceties of life; the same newspapers that cover me with abuse would have vaunted me to the skies without my having to give myself much trouble about that. They would willingly have pardoned and made innocent some of the peccadillos of my youth in order to raise me up and praise in every manner possible the zealot of good and healthy traditions ... but that could not be my lot; my convictions were too sincere, my faith in the present and in the future of art too ardent and too positive." (22.210)

He was not to be diverted by traditionalists who criticized the 'new' music for lacking form and discipline. He wrote to Wilhelm von Lenz on 2 December 1852:-

"Undoubtedly ... we shall encounter head-on those perennial problems of authority and freedom. But why should that frighten us? In the liberal arts, fortunately they entail none of the dangers and disasters which their fluctuations occasion in the political and social world, for in the realm of the Beautiful, genius alone is the authority, dualism disappears ... " (18.168)

In his dedication to new music, he wrote to Dingelstedt in October 1850:-

"Either our theatre must express its regret

for having performed great tragic and lyrical masterpieces such as Tannhauser and Lohengrin, devoting itself heart and soul to the infernal deities of stagnation, decrepitudes and the most idiotic banality ... or it must go forward." (17.130)

Young composers who appealed to him for assistance were encouraged, their music analysed and criticized, helped to performance and publication. Similarly, performers were helped with free instruction and his undertakings to procure them engagements. He drew a clear line of demarkation between genius and talent. The best he accepted as they were; lesser talents he tried to improve through suggestion and advice; the truly bad were never cut to pieces - it was correctly ignored. (18.163)

In helping others, Liszt was prepared to take on a great deal of extra work on their behalf, even during the years when he was still pursuing his own career as a virtuoso pianist, as evidenced in a letter to Schumann from Albano, dated 5 June 1839. After expressing his pride at having Schumann's Fantasie dedicated to him and the great pleasure he derived from Schumann's Scenes of Childhood, he continued:-

"If you could complete such a piece (for ensemble) by next winter, it would give me real pleasure to make it known in Paris where compositions of this kind ... have more success than you may think. I would gladly undertake to place your manuscript ... meantime I expect to give a public performance of your Carnival, some of the Davidsbundler Dances and some of the Scenes from Childhood." (9.214)

When his Hungarian Rhapsodies Nos. 14, 12, 6, 2, 5 and 9 were orchestrated, Liszt generously described them on the title page as being 'arranged by the composer and Franz Doppler', but Liszt's English pupil and friend, Walter Bach, said that Doppler was a flautist who had only a small hand in their arrangement and that Liszt, in acknowledging indebtedness to Doppler, was trying to help him. (21.45)

Once he resided at Weimar, Liszt was visited by a stream of musicians

whom he tried to aid. Anton Rubinstein, fondly called Van II by Liszt, alluding to his resemblance to Beethoven, received all possible help from him, but Rubinstein's conservatism prevented his appreciating Liszt. He also tried to help Aleksandro Serov, Ede Réményi, Smetana and Robert Franz, Rossini and the extremist Berlioz. He befriended Cesar Franck when Franck's contemporaries in Paris despised him. When Grieg visited Liszt, he was told:-

"Continue on your way. I tell you you have a great gift. Don't let yourself be deterred."

Grieg recalled these words whenever he felt discouraged. 'The memory of that hour will preserve its wonderful power and support me in the days of misfortune.' (17.179)

Liszt thought so highly of Wagner as a composer that he helped him in every possible way, even to the detriment of his own relationship with Princess Carolyne, who disliked Wagner, and his position at Weimar, as Wagner's political activities made him unpopular in Germany. After fleeing from Saxony to avoid arrest through political involvement, Wagner arrived in Weimar penniless, passportless, his future in Liszt's hands. He arrived while Liszt was rehearsing Tannhauser. Liszt then set about bringing Wagner's wife Minna from Saxony to join her husband, who had settled in Switzerland. Liszt financed both Wagner and Minna's journeys and was to be a constant source of financial help to Wagner from then onwards. Insofar as Wagner's music was concerned, Liszt conducted performances of the operas in the Weimar theatre despite knowing of the Court's strong disapproval of Wagner. Lohengrin, Tannhauser, Flying Dutchman, Das Liebesmähler Apostel and Eine Faust Overture were all produced there. Liszt was well aware that his championship of Wagner was detrimental to his own career. In a letter to Agnes Klindworth, he wrote:-

"... all the time I have never concealed from myself that my position was most difficult and my task most awkward, for many long years at least. Wagner, having made such brave innovations and accomplished such admirable master-pieces, my first care must be to conquer a foundation, a root, for his works in German soil at a time when he was an exile from his country and all

the little theatres of Germany were afraid to risk his name on their programmes. Four, or five years of hard work, if you like, on the part of myself have been sufficient for what has been accomplished in spite of the exiguous means that were at my disposal." (22.211)

His literary work also advanced Wagner's cause. His Musical Reviews and essays were such that Wagner wrote to Liszt:-

"For the first and only time you give me the joy of being understood. See, in you, I have unfolded completely. Not a tiny fibre, not the smallest heartbeat remains which you have not felt with me." (10.219)

Another letter, after the appearance of an article of Liszt's in the Journal des Debats describing Tannhauser, says of Liszt:-

"Is he too full of love, and does he resemble Jesus on the cross who helps everyone but himself?"
(3 Letter 18)

Even when his friendship with Wagner was temporarily terminated over Cosima, Liszt's daughter, leaving her husband Hans von Bulow to live with Wagner, Liszt did not withdraw his ardent support of Wagner's music despite pressure from Princess Carolyne. (4.97)

Of Liszt's 'An die Künstler', based on some lines of Schiller, Wagner wrote:-

"This, your address to the artists, is a grand, beautiful, splendid trait of your artistic life. I was deeply moved by the force of your intention ... I, at least, know nobody who could do something of this kind with such force." (21.95)

As a teacher, too, Liszt was exceptional. When in Weimar, he gave lessons not only on the piano, but also on the harp and trombone. Through expert teaching, he trained pianists of a new generation. At Weimar he composed until midday, taught in the afternoons and gave concerts for his students every Sunday morning. The letters of Hans von Bulow describe how at Weimar Liszt threw himself heart

and soul into his teaching, devoting himself to it with his whole being. Borodin said of him:-

"If he accepts someone as a pupil, he rarely restricts himself to the formal relationship of teacher and pupil; he follows the private lives of his pupils with the warmest interest. He shares their joys and troubles, he is affected by their family relationships or love affairs. And how much tenderness, tact, gentleness, plainness and kindness pervade his whole being in the act of teaching! I was able to see it with my own eyes and it is my living experience of it which makes me think so highly of Liszt as a man." (17.214)

His American student, Amy Fay, said of Liszt:-

"Nothing could exceed Liszt's amiability, or the trouble he gave himself, and instead of frightening me, he inspired me. Never was there such a delightful teacher, and he is the first sympathetic one I've had. You feel so free with him and he develops the very spirit of music in you. He doesn't keep nagging at you all the time, but leaves you your own conception. Now and then he will make a criticism or play a passage, and with a very few words, give you enough to think of all the rest of your life. He doesn't tell you anything about technique. That you must work out for yourself." (12.188)

Borodin wrote in a letter to Mme. Borodin, Jena, July 12 1877, as follows:-

"He pays little attention to technique, to fingering, but concerns himself primarily with interpretation and expression. But, except in rare cases, his students possess excellent techniques, although they stem from very different schools." (18.215/216)

No other Western composer had the same rapport with the Russians as Liszt. Towards the end of his life he found a rejuvenating force in Russian music and considered it to be preparing for the future, unlike Western music, which was stagnating. Apart from his influence on Russian composers, he made a great impact on aspirant

Russian pianists. In his lifetime, Russian pupils beat a path to his door, turning Weimar into a Slav. preserve.

Spanish composer Albeniz, at eighteen years of age, thought so highly of Liszt that he gave concerts until he had sufficient funds to go to Budapest to see his idol, whom he admired beyond all living men. He followed Liszt to Weimar and Rome where he had lessons from him and whose influence is apparent in his more serious mature works. (22.313)

Any doubts as to Liszt's ability as a teacher are dispelled by the many fine pianists who were his pupils and whose names are remembered in the latter half of this century. Siloti, Emil Sauer, Felix Weingartner, Moriz Rosenthal, Frederick Lamond, José Vianna da Motta, Zarembski, Reisenauer, Joseffy, d'Albert, Friedham. Aus der Ohe, Stavenhagen, Ansorge, Robert Freund, Aladar Juhász, Károly Azgházy, Arpád Szendy, Istvan Thomàn, Von Bulow, Tausig, Sophie Menter, are but a few. Pupils flocked to him from every country and his influence has filtered down through them to this very day.

Liszt came near to realising his aim of making Weimar a permanent centre of the arts. His ventures prospered during the lifetime of the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna, who paid his salary, as she was devoted to music. Her son, Karl Alexander, was not - his love was the theatre and Liszt's money-troubles date from his succession in 1853. The crisis came when Karl Alexander appointed Dingelstedt to be Director of Theatre. Dingelstedt soon cut out of the state's budget any requests put forward on behalf of music. He reduced the musical programmes. The resultant frustrations, coupled with the rebuffs Princess Carolyne was receiving from the Weimar Court, who succumbed to pressure from Tsar Nicholas I, led to great disillusionment and it needed only an unsuccessful performance of The Barber of Bagdad, which was cat-called and hissed at, to persuade Liszt to resign from his post. He left Weimar in 1861, depressed and bitter. His plans for 'music of the future' had crumbled. In 1860 he wrote:-

"About twelve years ago I had dreamed of a new period for Weimar, comparable to that of Charles Augustus ... the wickedness ... of local circumstances, jealousies and ineptitudes both within and without have prevented the realization of this vision." (19.295)

Yet once he had left, Karl Alexander made repeated attempts to persuade Liszt to Weimar for part of each year. He only appreciated what he had once he had lost it. He admired Liszt as a man and musician and the difficulties between them had been over Wagner and the Princess. When Liszt returned to Weimar in 1869 at the personal request of the Grand Duke, he was warmly welcomed - but the Princess was excluded from the invitation. By then her relationship with Liszt had cooled and neither she nor Liszt demanded acceptance of her presence as they certainly would have during the days of high passion. Liszt took up residence, alone, in a comfortable two-storey villa placed at his disposal by the Duke.

The disillusionment he suffered when his aspirations for Weimar were thwarted merely turned his questing spirit in new directions. His life now entered a new phase, with time divided between Rome, Weimar and Budapest. Liszt concentrated his energies on teaching and composing. One cannot help but admire the courage of the aging Liszt in striking out into new and uncharted ways at a time in life when he could have rested on his laurels, yet despite a complete lack of appreciation, he set about composing music of the kind he felt appropriate to the changing times. He once listed the countries unreceptive to his compositions. He wrote to Antal Augusz as early as March 1854:-

"A hail of press reviews pelts my compositions not only in Vienna but even to some extent in Russia and America. On all sides, in Leipsig, in Berlin and along the Rhine, in St. Petersburg and New York as in Vienna, learned critics have declared that it is a crime and an offence against art to approve of my compositions or even hear them without first condemning them." (17.142)

If the public was unreceptive to his romantic works, the austere

compositions of his old age certainly eluded them. Liszt well knew the cost of turning from the known paths. He wrote to Richard Pohl at Baden-Baden from Rome in 1868:-

"Courage is the mainspring of our best qualities; where it is lacking, they wither and without courage one is not even sufficiently prudent. One must, of course consider, reflect, calculate, weigh up the pros and cons. But after that, one must make up one's mind and act, without paying undue attention to the direction of the wind or to any passing clouds." (9.218)

Mussorgsky wrote of Liszt:-

"Liszt is daring by nature; he has a certain thirst for adventure and would surely undertake excursions with us into unknown fields." (24.34)

What exactly were these 'unknown fields'? In composition, he ventured further than any of his contemporaries towards the breakdown of conventional tonality. He resorted to use of the gypsy scale, modes, pentatonic scales, bare 5ths, dissonant 4ths and Slavic chords. There is in particular, an absence of accepted cadences and a tendency to deliberate vagueness of tonality in his later works. In these, he made use of augmented chords or the whole-tone scale. He also made increased use of bold chromatic harmony. 'Il Penseroso' from his second volume of Years of Pilgrimage, is notable for this and anticipates the style of Wagner's 'Tristan' which was not composed until 20 years later. (21.30) Liszt's music enriched Wagner's language, which became less conventional, more pictorial and dramatic, and taught him much in the use of handling chromatic harmony. Wagner admitted this in a letter to Von Bulow:-

"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 indiscreet, to say the least, of friend Pohl to babble this secret to the whole world." (21.64)

Liszt's Variations on a Theme of Bach makes advanced use of chroma-

ticism, resulting in strained tonality. The works of his old age also extend tonality to its limits and more often end with a chord in inversion rather than in root position. His sliding chromaticism was the beginning of the decline of the tonal system at the end of the 19th century in the works of composers like Reger. In his 'Totentanz' Liszt used chromaticism to such an extent that tonal analysis is hardly possible. His late pieces seldom modulate but have keys and harmonies side by side, gliding from one to another chromatically, modally or by means of the gypsy scale. Busoni commented:-

"The harmony of a revolutionary lies in the steady hand of a sovereign." (29.234)

In 'Via Crucis' there is consistent use of experimental harmony, particularly that derived from the whole-tone scale, and while restrained and devout, represents the fulfilment of Liszt's aim to create a new kind of church music by applying a new harmonic technique within the old liturgical framework. It is a sincere and moving work which was rejected in his own lifetime. After its first London performance in 1952, a critic wrote that it was remarkably attuned to the 20th century spirit and ideal. (21.120) His restless experimentation was not just a desire to produce something new, but an earnest endeavour to reach a unique and essential means of expression. In his late works he drew his visions from within himself, whereas before he had turned to literature and art for inspiration. What is even more astounding than the boldness of Liszt's ventures in these last pieces, is the certainty with which those ventures succeed. (29.234)

As early as the 1830's Liszt worked on the idea of a possible 'ordre omnitonique' which might supersede normal tonality. (61.88) A recently discovered and published piece is actually called 'Bagatelle ohne Tonart'. Clearly Liszt was working towards atonal music which characterized the earlier part of this century, as also towards the free and equal use of all the 12 tones of the chromatic scale. The search is still on for his 'sketches for a harmony of the future' - a treatise disclosing his thoughts on the suspension of tonality;

the restructuring of chords, e.g. chords built upon 4ths, hailed as Schönberg's achievement, and other experiments carried out in his late piano pieces. Was he so disillusioned with the poor reception of these pieces that he destroyed it? Friedman, Liszt's secretary, saw a notebook answering the description in 1885 and said:-

"This will make you responsible for a lot of nonsense which is bound to be written some day."

Liszt replied:-

"That may be. I have not published it because the time is not yet ripe." (19.321)

This is the last we have heard of it.

In his last works Liszt was truly prophetic. R. Leibowitz said that:-

"Many a radical achievement of modern music was born on the pages of Ferenc Liszt; these discoveries were determined and elicited by his efforts." (24.55)

The texture of these pieces is supremely thin - long passages in single notes or perhaps two lines which clash dissonantly - e.g. La Lugubre Gondola, which bears a strong resemblance in style to the Barcarolle from Bartok's Out of Doors suite. This purity of texture is also similar to that used by Stravinski and even Webern in that every note is important and nothing is wasted or put in for mere effect. They have been pruned almost to the bone. Yet in his own lifetime these works were bitterly condemned by his critics and would have wrung a reply from a lesser man. (27.87) Even when Liszt used conventional harmonic techniques, he made his mark. His Fugue upon the name BACH of 1857 is one of the most tremendous achievements in contrapuntal music.

In the use of form, too, Liszt was innovative. His one-movement symphonic poems showed the greatest advances in symphony from the

time of Beethoven, in concentration of musical thought coupled with literary influences. Greater unity was his objective. Others who followed after Liszt and were to use this one-movement form were Schönberg in his 1st chamber symphony, 1st string quartet and his string trio; Sibelius, Willem Pijper, Karl Hartmann and Miakovsky in their one-movement symphonies. His symphonic poems were to inspire those of Richard Strauss and works by Balakirev and Rimski-Korsakov, such as Thamar and Scheherazade.

In using the dotted Csardas rhythm and the rhapsodic and improvisational elements of Hungarian music, Liszt showed a daring courage, for the national musical idiom had become impersonal, hackneyed and colourless. (24.60) In Liszt's hands they became a rejuvenating force, resulting in freedom from balanced phrase-structure.

Saint-Saëns also attributes to Liszt:-

"... the invention of picturesque musical notation, thanks to which by an ingenious disposition of the notes and an extraordinary variety in presenting them to the eye, the author contrived to indicate the character of the passage and the exact way in which it should be executed."
(25.230)

Successive composers influenced by Liszt were Wagner, Franck and Ravel (the principle of arranging the entire structure round a single idea); Debussy (colourism); Stravinski (its glittering and diabolical qualities); Shostakovich (motif technique); also, in one or another way, Elgar, Bruckner, Mahler, Busoni, Reger, Smetana, Dvorak, Scriabin, Szymanowski, Tchaikowsky, Glazunov and Miakowsky. (24.72) In adopting his ideas, these composers have proved that Liszt was a musician who took music seriously and who, in turn, should be taken seriously.

Nor did his venturesome spirit or talent stop with composing. In Weimar, aged 36, he had his first real schooling in orchestration and conducting, and even in these fields he was unique. Sitwell says:-

"... (he) gave reign to his new genius in a series of experiments, some of which still astonish after a century." (22.303)

He first approached orchestral writing very diffidently with help from men like Conradi and Raff, but he revised the final version himself and after 1854 was master enough not to need assistance. Eventually the Weimar orchestra was considered to be one of Europe's best. Proof of Liszt's proficiency with the orchestra was apparent from the quality of the musicians he was able to recruit at minimal pay.

Beckett maintains that it was the same showman's talent that had flourished in his virtuoso piano performances that now found an outlet in conducting and pointed the way to the modern virtuoso conductor. (5.36) Certainly, as in his piano performance, tempo was modified for expressive reasons and Liszt conducted in phrases rather than beats. The freedom he brought to the art was later to be a great influence on conductors of the stature of Von Bulow and Richter, but at the time Liszt was much criticized by the traditionalists. He explained his attitude to conducting as follows:-

"For the works of Beethoven, Berlioz and Wagner, etc., I see fewer advantages than elsewhere (and even elsewhere I would contest them) in the conductor's functioning like a windmill, sweating profusely the better to communicate warmth to his personnel. In these works ... where it is a question of understanding and feeling ... of addressing the intelligence and of firing hearts in a communion with the beautiful, the great and the true in art and poetry, the capacity and the ancient routine of the average maître de chapelle are no longer adequate; indeed, are contrary to the dignity and sublime freedom of art. Though it displease my complacent critics, I shall never accommodate myself to the role of 'professor' of time-beating, for which my 25 years of experience, study and sincere passion for art have in no way prepared me ... we are pilots, not drillmasters." (18.166)

There were those who agreed with him, particularly musicians of the 'modern' school, like Wagner, who said:-

"I saw Liszt conducting a rehearsal of my Tannhauser and was astonished at recognising 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." (5.41)

As for his orchestration, this too was in advance of its time and set the first standards of modern orchestration. His use of solo instruments and transparent textures contrasted with the thick orchestration of his contemporaries. He anticipated the idea of 'chamber music for full orchestra' which is found in the works of Schönberg, Stravinski, Webern and others. His aim was always clarity as he did not care for the romantic opaque texture and he reserved heavy scoring for selected tutti passages. (21.85) Ravel wrote in a concert review of 1912:-

"and his dazzling orchestra, of a sonority at once powerful and light - what a considerable influence it exercised on the most openly avowed of Liszt's adversaries." (18.399)

Bartok said that as an innovator in instrumentation, with his absolutely individual orchestral technique, he stands beside the other two great conductors of the 19th century, Berlioz and Wagner. (18.420)

Liszt was always interested in sound effects. As late as the 1850's he commissioned from Alexandra, the inventor of the harmonium, a weird construction with triple keyboard, sixteen registers and stops to reproduce winds, after his own design. It had no followers but shows a continuation of his unending search for a new means of expression and the undampened enthusiasm of his adventurous spirit. (19.56/57)

Yet another facet of his art was his literary gift. His essays on the operas of his contemporaries are pioneers in musical criticism. The Countess d'Agoult is given credit for many of the writings attributed to Liszt. Certainly she did much organizing of material and some of the writing, but that pertaining to music was beyond

her scope. While she considered herself his cultural superior, she was, in fact, little better informed than he. That a woman with literary pretensions and small talent be given credit for writings, that whatever they lack in style, show a mind more curious, varied and eclectic than hers, is ridiculous. (18.176/177) So, too, is the blame heaped on Liszt for the many purple prose-passages such as those found in the book on Chopin, which are far more likely to have come from her pen. Even in his less meritworthy efforts, such as his book on gypsy music, with all its faults, Liszt is to be applauded for breaking new ground. The book contained some unfortunate lapses, mainly because when Liszt wanted to repatriate himself, the language posed difficulties and he was unable to refer to untranslated sources. As to his book on Chopin, whatever its limitations, where others found a rival in Chopin, Liszt saw only a brother-in-arms. (25.243) His detractors should also concede that Liszt's writings of worth far outweighed those open to criticism. Liszt was astonishingly selfless when involved with advancing the work of other musicians. Hanslick said of him:-

"Had he been entirely self-centred like most other great creative artists, no doubt his position as a composer would have been different." (4.94)

As it is, his greatness has been under-estimated, if not often overlooked completely.

Liszt's relationship to the 20th century is threefold; how far he anticipated 20th century developments in music; how far he influenced them; how far his prophecies about music of that time have been proved correct. His was a lone voice in the wilderness proclaiming the genius of Wagner at a time when Wagner's name and music were anathema. He was extremely interested in 'The Ring' being produced at Bayreuth, which he considered the work of the century and the 'miracle' of German art. He incurred the Princess Carolyne's displeasure through his excitement over the work, about which he wrote:-

"Even the most sober-minded people will be enthu-

siastic about it someday, despite the fact that it cannot be measured by average standards."
(9.217)

He was prophetic about his own works too, aware that they were unsuccessful in his time but knowing that his experiments would be carried further in the music of a later generation. This has indeed been the case. Bartok said of Liszt:-

"Courageous and prophetic gestures, things never said before ... it is on account of these that Liszt rises to the heights of the greatest composers ... he opened ... a multitude of novel possibilities in his works - without having fully exhausted them." (24.78)

His own compositions showed a diversity of interest. One has to agree with Bartok when he queries:-

"Is it not strange what a large proportion, as a matter of fact, the major part of musicians are unable to develop a liking for Liszt's music in spite of its novelty and magnificence? ... I am speaking of prominent and progressive musicians both in Liszt's and our own time." (24.76)

Perhaps these artists, like those of Liszt's age, have been confused by the distorted image of a many-faceted talent, unable to accept the flamboyance of his art and therefore denying all of it? Biographer Kentner sees another possible explanation for the criticism levied by Liszt's fellow-musicians:-

"It is typical of the injustice with which contemporary criticism treated Liszt ... that he was castigated mercilessly for faults which were condoned in other composers of his time such as Weber, Brahms and later, Richard Strauss and Mahler. A reason for this injustice may be that Liszt's faults are on the surface, obvious to everyone, while the positive proof of his genius often lies hidden below." (16.178)

It is certain that the lack of appreciation by his contemporaries saddened Liszt and shook his self-confidence. He was obsessed with the guilt of failed genius, gifts wrongly spent. Those of

today's musicians who have made a study of his music vindicate him.
Bence Szabolcsi states:-

"There is no doubt whatever that Liszt's musical influence will continue to grow and that man will continue to be moved by his humanity and his heroism." (17.238)

Humphrey Searle agrees:-

"We must salute him for his unique contribution to the music of his time and must acknowledge that without it, the music of our time would be very different." (21.123)

In Franz Liszt there was continual strife between the two warring factions of histrionic, self-seeking showman and sincere, selfless musician. The showman on his own would soon have been forgotten; the musician would have lived on, but without the colour and fire that gave life to the man - and his music. Each complemented the other and resulted in Liszt, the enigma!

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F. LISZT — THE PERFORMER.



IN HUNGARIAN NATIONAL
COSTUME.



Chapter IV

AMBIGUITY IN LISZT'S RELATIONSHIPS -

PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL

"... man's whole environment is but end and beginning, life after death and death before life. Nevertheless he is seized instinctively and inexplicably with an aversion to the weaknesses of all beginnings, to the painful character of every end, while a no less instinctive and inexplicable impulse urges him to destroy in order to recreate. Experiencing disgust once he has reached the saturation point and provoked to desire by his eagerness for novelty, he feels himself impelled in perpetual alternation by an innate and sovereign longing for a satisfaction to which he cannot give a name but which every change seems to promise him. From the struggle between these two exertions arise conflict and sorrow, our common, inevitable lot." (23.115)

(Franz Liszt in an article on Berlioz's 'Harold' Symphony)

From the above can be seen that Franz Liszt was aware of the contradictory forces warring within him, although he tried to rationalize these by claiming them as attributes of all men. They were to influence every aspect of his life from his relationships with friends, patrons, lovers and children, to his relationship with the church.

One aspect of these contradictory elements was that arrogance and humility were equally part of his nature. The first estranged him from, and the second endeared him to, the people he mixed with. While it may be true that in some measure his arrogance was a national trait, peculiar to his being born Hungarian, Liszt carried his national pride to absurd limits when one considers for what a short period of his life he actually lived in Hungary. In a letter to friend Augusz of 7 May 1873, he wrote:-

"Despite my lamentable ignorance of the language,

I must be permitted to remain from birth to death, in heart and soul, a Hungarian." (17.179)

In his own way he was doubtless sincere, but the ostentatious way in which he displayed his nationalism aroused amusement in some quarters and mistrust in others. In trying to win people he was not above using his nationality as an attraction - as when he visited England, where he wore various Hungarian costumes to capture the interest of the populace. In fact, he achieved the very opposite of what he intended. England was an ultra-conservative country where the most rampant conceit must wear the mask of modesty and Liszt's blatant parading of his nationality was more than the English could countenance. (The queen was one exception. She was enchanted with him, but biographer Perenyi maintains that she had a known penchant for good-looking foreigners in fancy dress! [19.211])

In similar vein, many affectations born of Liszt's pride caused annoyance where they were intended to court admiration. An example was the bejewelled sword, displayed on-stage. Another was his invention of the solo recital, described as follows in a letter to Princess Belgiojoso:-

"I have ventured to give a series of concerts all by myself, affecting the Louis XIV style and saying cavalierly to the public - 'the concert is ... myself!'" (19.49)

Liszt displayed the same overt self-satisfaction in his letter to Simon Loury in Vienna dated London, May 20 1841:-

"My two solo recitals, and above all the third for the Beethoven monument, are unrivalled concerts such as I alone can give in Europe at the present moment. The newspaper accounts can have conveyed only a very imperfect idea. Without vanity or self-deception, I think I may say that an effect so striking, so complete, so irresistible had never before been produced by an instrumentalist in Paris. When I have really finished my tour of Europe, I shall come and play them to you in Vienna, and, however weary people may be there after applauding me so much, I still feel strong enough to stir a public so intelligent and so outstandingly appreciative, which I have

always regarded as the born judge of a pianist."
(9.214)

In these instances his conceit was harmless. On other occasions, however, it was either damaging to himself or to other people in that he sometimes lacked consideration for their feelings. On one occasion he and Massart were scheduled to play the 'Kreutzer' sonata. Sir Charles Halle attended the performance and relates that Massart was just commencing the introduction when the audience called that they wanted Liszt to play his fantasia on 'Robert the Devil'. When they persisted, Halle said that Liszt turned to Massart and waved him away without a syllable of excuse or regret. (15.105) However, Wagner was present at the same performance and he exonerated Liszt to some extent in his account:-

"It was done, however, with some reluctance ... a raving audience called thunderously for that fantasy, Liszt's most popular showpiece. It was a point in favour of this very talented man that he threw out a few angry words, 'Je suis le serviteur du public; cela va sans dire!' before sitting down at the piano and rattling the favourite piece contemptuously off. So is one punished for one's sins. One day Liszt will be called upon in heaven to play his fantasy on the devil before the assembled company of angels, though it will be for the very last time." (14.134)

He treated his friends with a similar mixture of arrogance and disarming ingenuity, to the point where many of them did not know what to make of him. Sir Charles Halle, who grew to know Liszt well, said of him:-

"To be different from the rest of mankind; to know nothing of the usual modes of living, or rather, to appear ignorant of them, seemed his one aim." (15.104)

He recounted an incident where he and Liszt dined pleasantly at the Cafe de Paris. When the waiter brought him the bill, which Halle says could hardly have amounted to 30 francs, Liszt asked quite

seriously whether Halle thought 40 francs would be sufficient for the waiter! (15.104) On another occasion, Halle himself was the victim of Liszt's conceit. Liszt and Halle were to play a duo on two pianos (the Fantasia from Bellini's 'Norma'). After enjoining Halle to take the theme at a moderate pace, Liszt proceeded to play it at such a pace that Halle, faced with some double octaves, had to struggle to keep up. In the second variation, the theme accompanied by chromatic scales, Liszt, instead of confining himself to the scales, altered them by introducing double and additional notes - an amazingly difficult feat, 'which made my hair stand on end'. When Halle's turn came, he confined himself to playing simple chromatic scales rapidly and effectively, earning applause from the audience - and from Liszt. (15.106) Their friendship therefore survived, as Halle's pride had not been affected, but other friends of Liszt did not escape as lightly and their relationships suffered correspondingly. The Schumanns were a case in point.

In 1837 Liszt published a long and favourable article on Schumann's keyboard works in *La Revue et Gazette Musicale*. Schumann was deeply appreciative as he was still struggling for recognition. They struck up a friendly correspondence. In 1838 Clara visited Vienna and heard Liszt play for the first time. A few weeks later, Liszt dedicated to Clara his newly-composed Paganini Studies, thus cementing that early acquaintanceship. The two composers met in Dresden in 1840. Liszt thought Schumann excessively reserved and stated egocentrically that he imagined Schumann would be 'much attached to me'. (19.208) They had corresponded for several years, exchanged scores and each written a laudatory article of the other. They got on well, as Robert wrote to Clara that it was as if he and Liszt had known one another for twenty years. (30.162) They journeyed back to Leipzig together and spent a fortnight in one another's company. Schumann wrote two glowing reviews of Liszt's historic concerts in the Leipzig Gewandhaus in which Liszt publically sight-read Mendelssohn's Concerto in D minor. Schumann was at that time in the middle of a lawsuit against Friederich Wieck over Clara's hand in marriage. Liszt championed Schumann and snubbed Wieck, who, outraged, started a slander campaign against Liszt and his

brilliant pupil Hermann Cohen in the Leipsig newspapers. Liszt shrugged it off, but Cohen took Wieck to court and won the case. Clara now sprang to her father's defence and turned against Liszt. This placed some strain on the friendship, but it would have healed had Liszt not offended the Schumanns deeply through his lofty and inconsiderate behaviour. Passing through Dresden, he paid them a surprise visit. Clara went to much trouble to arrange a dinner, followed by music, in his honour. A time was set, the musicians assembled but Liszt failed to appear - until two hours later. He added fuel to the flame by tactlessly referring to one item on the itinerary, Schumann's Piano Quartet, as 'Leipsigzerisch'. He then compounded his mistake by praising Meyerbeer at the expense of Mendelssohn. At that, Schumann sprang up and shouted:-

"Who are you that you dare to speak in such a way of a musician like Mendelssohn?"

He then stalked out of the room. Liszt turned to Clara and said:-

"Tell your husband that he is the only man in the world from whom I would take so calmly the words just offered me."

He then left the house. Clara was outraged:-

"I have done with him forever", she declared.
(30.163)

She was thenceforth odious to him, who did more for her adored husband's music than any other man. Her disapproval did Liszt infinite harm. She became founder of the cabal against him which resulted in 1860 in Brahms and Joachim compiling a manifesto condemning certain compositional practices used by composers of the 'new music', of whom Liszt was a prominent member. Yet for a long time Liszt could not understand that Clara detested him and thought she was wonderful. When living at Weimar, he was always inviting her to visit him there and years passed before the Schumann's ungraciousness registered. Their open hostility towards him contrasted greatly with his own short memory of the affair. With a kindness that typified his nature,

Liszt ignored the unpleasantness that had passed between them and continued to promote Schumann's compositions wherever he could. He conducted Part 2 of Schumann's Scenes from Faust and later gave the first performance of the incidental music to Manfred. All that this elicited was a note from Clara demanding the return of the autographed score, which he had hoped to keep as a token of friendship. Liszt's generous response was to dedicate the B minor piano sonata to Schumann in 1853. In 1855 he followed this with a full-scale production of Schumann's opera Genoveva. When Schumann died in 1856, Liszt was approached by Wasielewski, Schumann's first biographer, to help by sketching in details of their relationship. Ill at the time, Liszt left his sickbed in order to write Wasielewski an extremely long letter covering their 20 year old friendship in affectionate terms and making no mention of their personal quarrel. (30.164) Yet in 1857 when a committee was established to supervise a collected edition of Schumann's works, Clara did not hesitate to strike out the dedication to Liszt on the Schumann Fantasie and substitute her own name instead. The Fantasie then fell into a state of decline as neither Clara nor Liszt seemed particularly anxious to play it in public, as it symbolised too greatly the rift that now separated them. Clara finally performed it in 1867 and then appears to have dropped it from her repertoire. She, at least, was unable to come to terms with the inconsistency of Liszt's nature.

Another such was Chopin. Liszt counted him among his best friends, yet George Sand explained to a friend of herself and the Countess d'Agoult why she felt bound to answer the Countess's letters:-

"You saw how she accused him (Chopin), the friend of Liszt, of having detached me from her to him ... but the truth is ... I don't know how far, at the bottom of his heart, Chopin's friendship for Liszt goes. You know the excessive reserve of the former, his scrupulous delicacy." (19.195)

Yet in the face of real talent, Liszt was genuinely humble. He was surely aware that Berlioz liked him - but not his music. Most Liszt biographers state that the 'real, affectionate and serviceable' friendship described by Berlioz biographers failed to mention that

the services were mostly Liszt's for more than 30 years. Berlioz craved his friendship as much for its benefits as for its warmth.

"You write me letters 12 pages long dealing with me and my affairs and I am naïve enough to answer you on the same subject." (19.75)

Liszt was witness at Berlioz's wedding to Harriet Smithson in 1833, and, because he believed in Berlioz's talent, remained steadfast even after Berlioz started attacking him indirectly through cruel criticism of Wagner's works showing strong Lisztian tendencies. Berlioz suffered from his unkindness as much as Wagner or Liszt. He became very depressed and his works met with less and less favour. He and Liszt dined together in 1861 in Paris. Liszt felt very compassionate towards him:-

"His home life weighs on him like a nightmare ... outside it he meets with nothing but obstacles and mortifications ... he now habitually speaks in a low voice ... has neither friends nor partisans." (19.385)

In his dealings with Wagner, too, Liszt realized with a self-abnegation and a freedom from vanity almost unique in history that this contemporary was a man greater than himself and regarded his obligation to serve the artistic and personal purposes of Wagner almost as a sacred duty. (3. Preface) He first met Wagner in Paris in 1842. Wagner was aware of the adulation surrounding Liszt and was feeling disconsolate about his own future. He therefore thought Liszt to be 'strange and hostile' to his own nature. This report reached Liszt and he went out of his way to put an end to 'a casual disharmony between himself and a fellow-creature.' (Wagner's own account. 22.195/196) At his and Wagner's second meeting, Liszt sent Wagner a ticket for one of his recitals. Wagner was amazed at his virtuosity but was not in sympathy with him and did not seek to further the acquaintance. (5.40) During the next four years they met often and when Liszt greatly praised Rienzi after attending a performance, Wagner began to feel more attracted to him. Later Liszt unhesitatingly acknowledged Wagner's superiority to himself as a composer and pledged

himself to spare no effort to further Wagner's art. In 1880 he wrote to organist A. W. Gottschlag:-

"Wagner is the great need of the present with Liszt as a modest 'ad libitum' accompaniment."
(24.21)

To Wagner himself, he wrote:-

"Dearest Richard, you are truly a divine man - and it is my happiness to feel with you and follow you." (10.91)

Wagner was genuinely fond and admiring of Liszt and realized the extent to which Liszt was willing to push his own art into the background in order to serve bigger talents. After reading an article of Liszt's in the Journal des Debats, describing Tannhauser, he wrote:-

"All in him tends to be absolute, pure production and yet he has never concentrated his whole power of will on the production of a great work. Is he, with all his individuality, too little of an egoist?" (3 Letter 18)

His friendship with Liszt was governed to some extent by the consideration of what he could derive from it; of what Liszt could do for him. What he acknowledged as great and significant in Liszt's art was made so only as long and inasmuch as it furthered his own career. (24.22) Once he realized Liszt's intention to continue producing other 'foreign' musicians' work at Weimar, that Liszt was not going to concentrate exclusively on the development of German music, he began practising a number of small deceptions on his friend. He led Liszt to believe he was his only friend and representative in Germany when he was, in fact, cultivating people like Uhlig and inferring that works already commissioned by Weimar would, in fact, not necessarily be produced there as it lacked the correct facilities - for example, Young Siegfried. He also blamed Liszt for the poor production of his Lohengrin at Leipzig, whereas in fact Liszt was prevented by the local Kapellmeister from attending rehearsals, although he went twice to Leipzig for that purpose. (19.347) Never-

theless Liszt well knew what he was doing in championing Wagner. Even after their relationship was damaged by Wagner's stealing Cosima's affections from Von Bulow and his lack of appreciation of Liszt's later works, Liszt continued to assist him. In 1875 a 'Wagner' concert was held in Budapest to raise funds for the completion of the Bayreuth theatre. The Hungarians saw little reason to attend. Tickets were selling badly until Liszt announced that he would play the Beethoven E flat concerto at the concert. That same day all the tickets were sold. He never spoke of this to Wagner. He was also present at the opening of Bayreuth in 1876 and a constant visitor to the shrine for the rest of his life. (5.74)

His humility in regard to his friends evinced itself in a number of small courtesies. On one occasion during his last visit to England when he attended a dinner for 26 people at Westwood House, a talkative pianist upset him and he left the room abruptly. Alexander MacKenzie followed to see if he had gone to his room. He found Liszt gazing out of a window halfway up the stairs. After a few minutes reflection, he descended and rejoined the company as if nothing had happened, quite benevolent again. (22.323) On another, he walked from the Vienna Railway Station for one and a half hours at 5 a.m., not informing any friend or relative in Vienna of his arrival so as not to disturb their rest. (22.316) It is difficult to equate this kind of thoughtfulness with the arrogant inconsideration that he showed at other times. Fortunately there were friends who were able to forgive him his failings. Von Bulow, for example, despite having turned against Liszt's music, was very fond of him and when Liszt fell and hurt his leg in Weimar, in 1881, came to look after him. He was horrified to find among Liszt's pupils some parasites who were not only wasting his time, but stealing his money. Von Bulow soon dealt with them. (5.76)

Those who knew Liszt less well were not as charitable. When Tchaikowsky was approached in regard to letters from Liszt which were being collected for publication, he replied:-

"I possess only one short note from Liszt which is of so little importance that it is not worth your while to send it to La Mara. Liszt was a good fellow and ready to respond to everyone who paid court to him, but as I never toadied to him or to any other celebrity, we never got into correspondence." (my underlining) (22.286)

Berlioz explained the negative attitude of many of the people who associated with Liszt as follows:-

"Some had a grudge against him because of his extraordinary talent and success; others because he was witty and yet others because he has written too fine a cantata ... because he speaks French too well and knows German too thoroughly; because he has many friends and doubtless because he has not enough enemies." (19.210)

At the other end of the scale, his real friends chose to see only the good in him and would have agreed with Saint-Saëns, who wrote:-

"But even if the feelings of gratitude and affection with which I am filled, come before my eyes to colour his image, I do not greatly regret it." (25.244)

The combination of arrogance and humility is also found in Liszt's dealings with the nobility. In many ways, he overtly courted them. Liszt was one of the snobs of history. For all he said to the contrary, and he said a great deal, he did not want the old order destroyed; he merely desired to be embraced into it. He loved to discourse about his friendships with the titled, not distinguishing between those of quality and those without worth. He was pleased and vain about his association with all. The conquest of the aristocracy of the countries he visited was quite as intoxicating as the plaudits of the mob. Hero of the Paris salons since childhood, goodlooking and with genteel manners, the aristocrats of many lands welcomed Liszt into their midst. From the time of his first virtuoso concerts for the Vienna flood victims, he boasted about his association with the great.

"I am the man of the hour", he wrote to the Countess d'Agoult. (19.186)

There are constant references in his letters to her of his reception into 'the most elegant and aristocratic society', and how it would be 'impossible to ask more in the way of satisfaction of one's vanity.'

(5.24) When he and the Countess ended their liaison, she wrote bitterly:-

"Franz has abandoned me from such petty motives. Not for a great work or an act of devotion or out of patriotism; it was for salon successes, gossip-column glory, invitations from princesses."
(5.18 and 19.187)

In old age when Liszt lived in Budapest for part of each year, he regaled Princess Carolyne with similar accounts of his socializing in the highest circles.

Yet despite his obsequious behaviour towards the nobles because of his desire to be accepted into their ranks, he did not hesitate to insult various of its members if he felt them wanting in any way. He refused to play before Louis Philippe and indeed was rude to him because of his Legitimist sympathies. When Louis Philippe recalled an earlier event when Liszt played at his house as a little boy and remarked that things had changed since then, Liszt replied that they had indeed, but not for the better! This cost him the Legion of Honour. The King of Prussia, Frederick William IV, was present at most of the Berlin concerts. He presented Liszt with a valuable purse of diamonds, which Liszt threw contemptuously into the wings. This endeared him to the audience as the Prussian monarch was not popular. Liszt refused to extend the usual invitations to his concerts to Ludwig I of Bavaria as he was a rival for the affections of Lola Montez. He treated Ernest August of Hanover similarly and refused to play for Isabella II of Spain because court etiquette forbade his personal introduction to the queen. Nicholas I incurred his annoyance by remarking of Liszt:-

"As to his long hair and political opinions, they displease me."

Liszt took his revenge when he reprimanded the Tsar for talking during one of his performances. (22.112 and 27.51) These clashes with the elite sometimes injured Liszt's reputation and career but his pride was such that he would rather take that risk than accept a slight.

We find the same ambiguity in Liszt's dealings with the people of Weimar. On the one hand he appealed for their support in his efforts to establish Weimar as a leading centre of music. On the other, he chose to remain very much the foreigner and made no secret of his dislike of the locals, whom he regularly denounced as Philistines. He was wrong to group the whole population under this heading as it was a town full of cultivated people. Liszt was completely lacking in courtesy towards the Weimar populace, as for example in regard to membership of his club 'The New Weimar League' (established in the mid-fifties.) No local could belong unless he was an artist - an insult to many cultured people. (19.287) He also offended Weimar citizens by ignoring many of their most revered composers of the past. Some of the troubles he was later to experience at Weimar were thus at least in part of his own making, as he antagonized many important people of that city. Nor would he meet them half-way. After he had left, his birthday was celebrated there in 1860 with a torchlight procession and he was made an honorary citizen. Liszt remained aloof and unmoved, totally unforgiving.

Even after becoming an Abbe, the humility expected of a man of the cloth was often found wanting. When he conducted his master-classes at Weimar, we learn from a student that he expected to be treated with exaggerated respect - no-one could speak to him until he had opened the conversation. (5.63) One room of the Altenberg was used for housing relics of his virtuoso career. The sword of honour, jewelled batons and snuffboxes, programmes and laurel wreaths: dipped in silver to preserve them; gold and malachite objects - all memorials to his glittering past.

As a composer, too, we find contradictions in his approach. When Liszt published his Paganini Etudes, he placed Schumann's version

of the G minor 'tremolo' study side by side with his own, new and far more brilliant transcription, as if to show his superiority over even Schumann's new advances. (21.20) Yet of his Legend No.1 based on 'Little Flowers of St. Francis', Liszt said in the preface:-

"My lack of ingenuity and perhaps also the narrow limits of musical expression possible in a work of small dimensions written for an instrument so lacking in variety of accent and tone-colour as the piano, have obliged me to restrain myself and greatly to diminish the wonderful profusion of the text of the 'Sermon to the little birds'. I implore the glorious poor servant of Christ to pardon me for thus impoverishing him." (21.99)

An unduly self-effacing comment, for the piece is admirably written.

Insofar as his relationships with women are concerned, Liszt was again pulled in two directions. On one hand he wanted a kinship of the mind and spirit; on the other, physical attraction held great sway with him. His relationship with the first great love of his life, the Countess d'Agoult, was initially based on both. She was a beautiful woman and caught his attention at their first meeting.

"The woman came whom I shall not name, because, as Obermann said, 'she is worthy not to be named'. Sheathed in white veils, skimming over the ground as she sped along, she called to us in sweetly scolding tones, 'Still dreaming, you incorrigible artists? Don't you know it is time to work?' and we obeyed her words as those of a herald of light and peace." (17.53)

It is obvious from her memoirs that Liszt made an equally strong impression on her:-

"The door opened and a strange apparition met my eyes. I say apparition because no other words can describe the agitation aroused by this most unusual creature. Tall, very thin, with a pale face, great sea-green eyes in which lights could flash as rays on water; suffering

and yet dominating features, a hesitant gait, gliding rather than walking, an absent-minded look like a ghost that could be recalled to the dark at any moment. That was my first impression of the young genius that stood before me." (17.53)

Liszt met the Countess at Chopin's apartment towards the end of 1832. She was 28 years old; he, 22. Unhappily married to a man 20 years her senior, the mother of two children, she was captivated by Liszt's good looks, miscellaneous reading and her own vague aspirations, which she imagined fulfilled in him, though she was not especially fond of music. While her attraction for Liszt was mainly physical, he was also greatly influenced by her strength of character. She had a firm sense of direction. They met frequently, their conversation being of a philosophic bent - the destiny of mankind; of the soul; of God. (5.14) This appealed greatly to the other side of Liszt's nature - his lofty ideals and religious aspirations. When the Countess lost one of her children, his sympathy for her accelerated the relationship and they became lovers. When she fell pregnant, they decided to elope to Switzerland. Whether this turn of events was such that Liszt found himself the victim of circumstances he could not control, or whether he initiated the move, is a subject of dispute among his biographers. In any event, they made the move to Switzerland and his reputation was damaged irretrievably as he was branded as a person of loose morals. A daughter, Blandine, was born soon after their arrival.

At first all went well between Liszt and the Countess. They strove to complete the spiritual side of their alliance with reading, contemplation and work. The Countess took his education in hand and encouraged him to compose. He also attended lectures in philosophy at the University of Geneva. (22.36) Soon, however, the Countess became dissatisfied. She had been used to moving in the highest circles in Paris, but in Geneva she was ostracized by society, which, despite being of a strait-laced Calvinistic kind, was willing to accept Liszt. This was a blow to her pride, as she considered herself his superior. She hated his public appearances and the fuss she made about them bordered of the pathological, as she felt

that playing for money was depraved. Nor did his charity concerts redeem his stage-appearances in her sight. In a letter to George Sand, she referred to this as being the 'black spot' in her life and said to Hiller of people who felt she should be proud of Liszt's performing ability, 'Eh, I'm not proud at all ... ' (19.133) In her novel, 'Nelida', a thinly-disguised portrayal of her life with Liszt, she later wrote:-

"She foresaw her solitude being destroyed ... her sanctuaries invaded ... and herself thrust suddenly once more into the world from which she had fled." (5.18)

From the above it is clear that she realized that her hold on Liszt was weakened by the flattery and admiration showered on him by the public; that this adulation encouraged growth of an aspect of his personality that she could not dominate and which encouraged him to form a circle of friends whom she disliked, such as the converted Jew, Baron d'Eckstein, and Hermann Cohen, a good-for-nothing loafer who eventually became a monk and nursed the wounded in the Franco-Prussian war. The affection between herself and Liszt began to wane, despite their having another two children; a daughter, Cosima, born at Bellagio and named after Lake Como, and a son, Daniel, born in Rome. Finally they found they had little in common, but whether through force of habit or reluctance to admit that the relationship had soured, they strove to maintain it. Liszt had by then embarked on his concert tours, the incentive being the Beethoven Memorial Fund. While he wrote to the Countess nearly every second day for the first six months after their parting, he succumbed to the temptation of other women and embarked on a series of passing love affairs. Women threw themselves at him and he was a willing victim. - In Rome at a reception at the Villa Medici:-

"It was impossible to count the ravishing celestial women who came to fall trembling ... at the feet of the terrible enchanter." (19.83)

Of a visit to Moscow, Herzen said:-

"The ladies flocked around him as peasant boys on country roads flock around a traveller." (19.83)

In the salon of Princess Belgiojoso, Heine remarked caustically:-

"The women are always intoxicated when Liszt plays." (19.163)

News of his affairs soon reached the Countess, who became obsessed with them. She tackled him incessantly about his infidelity and could not resist tearing him apart. Liszt retaliated by asking bitterly:-

"The need to dominate, to tyrannise even, isn't that the driving force most inherent in your nature?" (19.233)

He then became involved with Lola Montez, who once bared her ample bosom on stage before Ludwig I of Bavaria. People like Mendelssohn and Schumann, upright husbands and fathers, were scandalized by his association with such an infamous woman. He travelled with her for a while but tired of her temperamental outbursts. He tried to escape her by bribing the hotel porter to lock her into their hotel room while he fled the town, adding extra money to his bill to cover any damage she might do, but she pursued him and much to his embarrassment, when he attended the dinner given in his honour at Bonn for the unveiling of the Beethoven monument, burst in and astonished the all-male guests by jumping onto the table and dancing a fandango. This kind of thing would not do at all in Germany and the episode rankled for years. The Countess felt so humiliated when she heard of the event that she broke with Liszt finally. Of his parting with her, Liszt said:-

"If one of us was to blame, it was certainly me and I fully accept it. Whatever happens, nothing can alter the deep respect and loyal devotion she has always inspired in me and which I shall feel for her to my dying hour." (17.106)

The Countess was very affected by the ending of their alliance. Emile Ollivier told Liszt that when he and the Countess travelled together through Italy, she often cried bitterly in places recalling her and Liszt's youthful travels. (17.154) Liszt was touched. However, she destroyed any residue of affection he still held for

her by aiming a mortal blow at his pride. In her hurt and anger, she became authoress. When Liszt heard she was writing her memoirs, he said he knew exactly what they would be ... poses and lies; and in many respects he was right. She saw things only as she wanted to and many of the letters she received from Liszt and kept, flatly contradict statements she made about him. In 1846 her book 'Nelida' appeared - her version of their relationship and very unflattering to Liszt. It did much to discredit him. He took it the only way he could, as if it had nothing to do with him and had kind words for the style in which it was written. As time went by, the Countess became increasingly embittered and circulated untrue rumours about Liszt which reached his ears. His love for her became transmuted into hatred. He cut himself off from her as if they had been life-long enemies. So deeply did he feel about her perfidy that he did not write to her even when their two children Daniel and Blandine, died. (11.89)

Years later when his marriage to Princess Carolyne was imminent, he visited Paris to see Wagner and could not avoid calling on the Countess, now known as Daniel Stern. They had not met for 16 years and conversation between them was stiff and conventional. She was now immersed in literature and seemed unmoved by the encounter. (22.212) Liszt was totally cured of any affection for her. When she died he showed no remorse, remembering too well their quarrels and the slights he had suffered because of her writings. A sad ending to what had been a passionate love affaire. ⁽¹⁾

Throughout Liszt's life, his relationships with women were ambivalent. Whilst still involved with the Countess, he enjoyed short-lived intensely physical affairs with women like the Countess Laprunàrede, Princess Gortchakoff, Lina Schmalhausen and the 6 ft. Marie Moychanoff Kalegris. At the same time, with Bettina von Arnim, nearly 60 years old, he conducted a fervid correspondence and their friendship was on a purely intellectual plane. George Sand's attraction for him was similarly as much of the mind as of the body. At the other

(1) Walker says that in 1845 Liszt proposed marriage to Countess Valentine Cessiat, niece of Lamartine, who refused him. (27.56) I have, however, been unable to substantiate this.

end of the scale, his liaisons with known courtesans Lola Montez and Marie du Plessis did not aspire to mental or spiritual kinship but were of a purely physical nature.

With the Countess d'Agoult, Liszt's conduct was such that:-

"Even when he is most passionate, most altered by desire, one feels nothing gross in these desires; the most delicate modesty would not be offended."

(From the Countess's diary. [19.83])

Liszt also told Arthur Friedheim that he had never brought shame to an innocent girl. (19.84) Hence his love-life seems to have been as much a mass of contradictions as his other relationships.

Liszt's second great love was Princess Carolyne Sayne-Wittgenstein, whom he met during his last concert tour of the Ukraine. At the age of 17, she had been married to someone totally unsuitable and after bearing him a daughter, separated from him and lived a secluded life on her estate. Unlike the Countess, she was physically unattractive. George Eliott described her as:-

"Short and unbecomingly endowed with embonpoint; at first glance the face is not pleasing and the profile especially is harsh and barbarian, but the dark bright hair and eyes give the idea of vivacity and strength." (19.308)

Gregorovius was less kind in his description:-

"Her whole being repels me - but she has a sparkling wit." (17.161)

The difference in looks between herself and the Countess Marie influenced at least one person. Von Bulow, on meeting the Countess in Zurich in 1858, was struck by her beauty and dignity:-

"I must not think of it lest I break out into a rage at the parodistic caricature which at the moment acts as the shadow to his light at the Altenberg", he said. (19.397)

Apart from her looks, the Princess was decidedly eccentric. Slightly masculine, she smoked cigars, furnished her palaces with oriental splendour, studied philosophical writings and, in common with the Countess d'Agoult, had literary aspirations. She was also very wealthy.

Some felt her fascination for Liszt lay in her vast fortune and title, yet he had no need of these for he had himself accumulated great wealth and his period of greatest devotion to the Princess was after she had lost a considerable portion of her fortune. To substantiate the claim that he had no intention of letting her support him, at the outbreak of the 1848 revolution, the Rothchilds suspended interest payments on the bonds representing his savings. Liszt considered returning to the concert platform on an American tour, but the suspension was discontinued and it proved unnecessary. At no time did he contemplate accepting financial aid from the Princess.

Her title, to such a snob, may have had some allure had not ten years with the Countess d'Agoult have proved this to be more of a handicap, with her continual reminders of her ascendancy over him. Liszt was also too experienced to see the Princess as a social asset - gauche, she dressed badly and was a religious fanatic. Her attraction for him was primarily one of character, containing within herself all the forces he lacked. In addition, not only did she adore him openly and selflessly, a quality most rare in his life, but she shared his views on many things including the relationship of music with literature and painting. Liszt admired her and regarded her as a kind of saint. It upset him terribly when people called her ugly.

"I, who claim to be a connoisseur ... maintain that she is beautiful ... because her soul lends her face the transfiguration of the highest beauty." (19.254)

The Princess was also a woman of quick decision and firm determination, and seems to have taken matters into her own hands. Within weeks of meeting Liszt, she resolved to follow him to Weimar, have her marriage annulled and marry him. She joined him just ahead of

the 1848 revolution. Russia closed its frontiers minutes after she had passed the barriers. Liszt was attracted to her but did not intend a permanent liaison and was surprised when she followed him. He told Fanny Lewald six months later that it was:-

"a hard decision for the Princess to follow me. I hadn't expected her." (19.266)

He was put out of countenance by her arrival and Pourtales described his as being:

"somewhat confused by all these matrimonial plans; he may have intended this to be a transitory affaire like all the others." (5.36)

The Countess d'Agoult took the loss of Liszt to Princess Carolyne surprisingly graciously, saying in a letter that after four years 'pleasure without love', he should seize upon the affection of his new love with joy. (19.262)

Liszt accepted the situation gracefully. At first he and the Princess maintained separate living quarters at Weimar, but he soon moved into the Altenberg with her and their life there was to last 12 years. Both he and the Princess had a childlike simplicity of faith in prayer and often prayed together in the small oratory of the house. Her marriage was not as easily annulled as she had expected and eventually she went to Rome to put her case to the authorities. Liszt was meantime resigned to the marriage. In a will drawn up a year before his 50th birthday, he wrote:-

"All that I have done and thought in the last 12 years I owe to her whom I have so ardently desired to call by the dear name wife." (22.215)

Yet his daughter Cosima said he regarded the impending marriage as 'a burial service'. (27.35) Carl Maria Cornelius, son and biographer of Liszt's secretary, confirms his lack of enthusiasm for the proposed marriage:-

"Liszt's nature was the last in the world to be suitable for marriage, and to tie himself

to an aging woman was more than could be expected of him. The Princess, in days gone by, had followed him from Russia and had thrown herself at his head. He had been chivalrous enough to comply with her humour and, to his own astonishment, the adverture developed into a passionate love, which, however, cooled down in the course of years." (5.49/50)

By 1853 he was feeling stifled by her love. She hovered protectively over him and would even kneel to light his cigars. According to biographer Perenyi, if he stirred in the next room, she would cry out, 'Is that you, my angel?' (19.387) She always called him 'The Great One' or 'The Master' and was too busy tending his flame to notice the social slights inflicted on her at Weimar. Even after 10 years of living together, their liaison was still the cause of scandal. The Princess, totally lacking in guile, made no friendly overtures to the residents and, in fact, openly showed her dislike of the strait-laced Germans, which did not help matters. (27.67)

In the meantime, Liszt's interest in other women had revived. While his ego thrived on the Princess's servile admiration, her excessive piety did not allow for an uninhibited enjoyment of the physical side of their relationship and he began to conduct a number of discreet affaires with more sensual women. The Princess was ever on the alert where his romances were concerned and developed a malignant hatred for the other women in his life, past and present. In order to maintain peace, Liszt pretended great interest in her literary works and managed his affairs more secretly. He formed a fairly serious alliance with Agnes Klindworth in Weimar, and even after she moved to Brussels, Liszt contrived to see her regularly. His letters to her are proof of their romantic attachment. The awareness of his double-dealing manifested itself in him as an uneasy conscience and he would flog himself with the Princess's virtues and the magnitude of her sacrifice. Yet this only contributed to the waning of their romance.

Their marriage was scheduled to take place in Rome two days before his 50th birthday, but on the eve of the wedding, the Vatican intervened

and marriage plans had to be cancelled while fresh enquiries were instituted. The Princess was devastated. She realized that without the hold of marriage, she would be unable to keep Liszt or turn him into her ideal of what he should be - the second woman to attempt to make of him what he was not. His duality of character prevented their success and himself from being able to avoid, or even wanting to avoid, their dominance. (5.50) In grief, Princess Carolyne turned more surely towards religion and became a recluse. She developed into a pious blue-stocking, retiring to their Rome apartments to write a treatise 'The Interior Causes of the Exterior Weakness of the Church' - 24 volumes! All day long and into the early hours of the morning, clad in fantastic colours, she sat cloistered in her study from which daylight and fresh air were carefully excluded. Liszt, once again a free man, also turned towards religion. Through ecclesiastical grace and favour he was given a beautiful set of apartments to live in at Madonna del Rosario just outside Rome and decided to become a priest. Even when the Princess's husband died in 1864, there was no question of their marrying, both having chosen new paths to follow. Liszt continued to visit her, but they now shared only friendship. Immersed in literary pursuits, she installed a printing press in her home. She continued to love Liszt devotedly. When he died, she closed her doors forever, seeing no-one and writing no letters. The final volume of her book was published in 1887. A fortnight later she died and was buried in Rome.

After Liszt took holy orders he moved to the Villa d'Este and travelled extensively, consequently seeing less of the Princess. When he did visit her, he had to submit to the ritual of waiting in an ante-chamber for some time before having access to her, lest he introduce any fresh air. (5.75)

Rome appealed to both his religious cravings and his worldly side, as it was international. He also enjoyed the church music; Palestrina, Allegri, Vittoria and the feeling that he kept company with the great, past and present. Holy orders notwithstanding, with his last years of freedom he indulged in a resurgence of social life,

an ever-growing love of brandy (once curtailed by the Princess) and gave vent to a gay and witty tongue. He also initiated a disastrous affaire with self-styled Cossack Countess, Olga Janina, when in his late fifties. She arrived in Rome aged 19 years after studying at the Kiev Conservatoire and persuaded Liszt to take her as a pupil. A hot-blooded young woman, she had been married at 15, horse-whipped her husband and left him on the second day of married life and became a mother at 16. Astute enough to realize the extent to which Liszt was ruled by his pride and his love of worldly comforts, she pandered to him by keeping large and expensive apartments and dressing extravagantly. (5.58) She followed Liszt to Tivoli, Rome and Weimar and then to Hungary. Her lapse at a charity concert at Budapest when her memory failed her while playing Chopin's G minor ballade angered Liszt. She went home and took a dose of laudanum, sleeping for 48 hours. She then burst into Liszt's apartment brandishing a revolver, threatening to kill both him and herself. She was disarmed, left for Paris and disappeared from his life, but avenged herself by writing two autobiographical novels in which the revolver story and others were recounted. (27.87) This affaire did Liszt great damage.

His last great love was another Slav., the Baroness Olga Meyendorf, much younger than himself and beautiful. She devoted herself to giving Liszt a comfortable old age. (19.225)

Insofar as his relationship with his children was concerned, Liszt showed a bewildering inconsistency and even cruelty. In the beginning he was fond of, and proud of them, as evidenced by this comment in a letter to Schumann, dated 5 June 1839:-

"As you may or may not know, I have a little daughter, three years old, who everyone agrees is angelic. (You see the platitude!) Her name is Blandine Rachel and her nickname 'Moucheron' (Midge). It goes without saying that her complexion is milk and roses and that her golden hair falls to her feet like a savages. For the rest, she is the most silent, the most gently

grave, the most philosophically merry child in the world. I also have every reason to hope that she will not be a musician; may God preserve her from it!" (9.213)

Liszt was so angered by the Countess d'Agoult's insinuations about his character in her writings that for some strange reason his censure embraced not only her, but the children too, and he turned against them. Even in happier times when his relationship with the Countess was still stable, neither he nor she could be called good parents. Almost from the first the children were placed with other people. He and the Countess were so busy leading their own lives that they had little time to spare to tend to their young. This had a devastating effect upon the children, who sought security in one another and became very close. Cosima, the only survivor, wrote:-

"The extraordinary position created for us by our birth forged a bond between us three such as the majority of brothers and sisters can scarcely picture ... and which I now drag about me like a heavy, cumbersome chain ... I often feel as though I had been torn up by the roots, for my heart is always seeking those two beings, who were so young, so original, so truly saintly, so completely mine." (19.135)

When Liszt and the Countess parted at the start of his concert career, baby Daniel was left with a nurse while the Countess took the little girls to Paris with her. When she spitefully spread abroad distorted stories about Liszt, he refused to have Blandine, at an impressionable age, live with her. She was sent to an elite school. Cosima missed her so much that eventually she was allowed to join her sister. Daniel now lived with his grandmother, Anna Liszt, and was so miserable without his family that she wrote to Liszt in despair, asking him to keep in touch with his son. It is unlikely that he bothered to do so, as he missed all the important happenings of their childhood such as first communions, school prizes, etc. He seldom visited France and after 1846 not at all. All three children later lived with his mother. Madam Liszt was devoted to them and they to her. When the Countess enraged Liszt through her slander, the children were forbidden to speak her name or have any contact with her.

This failed. They began to visit her. Liszt was so angry that he had them removed from his mother's care and placed with an ancient governess of Princess Carolyne. They were grossly unhappy, longed to visit him and said so in their letters, but he remained unmoved.

"As precious as your affection for me is, I tell you in all sincerity that I value it insofar as you are truly daughters of my own heart, whose upright will, sound judgement, cultivated talents, noble and firm character are such as to bring honour to my name and some consolation to my old age." (19.301)

This was in marked contrast to his attitude to Princess Carolyne's daughter, Marie, whom he adored. When he and the Princess were apart, he wrote almost as often to her as to her mother, about her dogs, rose bushes and other interests, and, when in her teens, treated her as a thinking adult. He had many loving names for her and at that stage she returned his affection. Contrast his letter to his children with the following written to Princess Carolyne's daughter:-

"I can never stop saying to you, dearest Magnolette, that you are grace, kindness, wisdom and even perfection." (19.301)

His own children became the sacrifice to his outraged pride and this they understood in an obscure way. The Princess was wise enough to see his love for her daughter as an extension of that he felt for her. While the child was at the Altenberg, it was attractive to him and he was happy to call it home. It lost its charm for him when Marie married and left for Vienna. In a letter to Karl Alexander, Liszt declared frankly that her departure had removed his last reason for remaining in Weimar. (19.400) It is ironic that once she had left, Marie became contemptuous of the gifted people she grew up with and washed her hands of her mother, Liszt and artists in general, while his own children retained affection for him, when they had little cause to do so.

When Liszt visited Paris with Wagner, he saw his children for the first time in eight years. His attitude to them remained unchanged

and he saw little of them.

"We were taken nowhere by him and we found it quite natural that he went out with Carolyne and Marie", wrote Cosima. (19.357)

The Princess must have been kind to them, as once back at Weimar, she received loving messages from them.

"We already love her like a mother and she said things to us which we shall never forget."
(19.357)

At this time the old governess looking after them suffered failing health. The Countess d'Agoult asked Liszt to come to Paris to discuss the children's future. He refused to do so and made arrangements to remove them from her vicinity and place them with Hans von Bulow's mother. Though dazzled by their mother, the children did not really feel deeply about her. None saw the Princess Carolyne as the villain of the piece, although many biographers have cast her as such. Liszt was the one to write to Agnes Klindworth:-

"I neither can nor wish to have them under my roof." (19.392)

He always maintained they were genuinely fond of the Princess, so whether she was involved in the decision to send them to Berlin remains questionable.

The children were unaware of his plans and came to the Altenberg thinking it to be a normal visit. They were well educated and well behaved, but still young enough to romp around. Liszt became exasperated and complained about the noise they made.

"They have invented a new form of government - the rule of noise!" he grumbled. (19.393)

This was the same man who a few weeks earlier had warmly welcomed the unruly Tausig into his house and treated him with affectionate indulgence when the boy sold the only copy of the Faust Symphony to a servant, eventually to be recovered from the dustbin! (19.313)

The children were aghast at having to stay with Mme. Von Bulow. The Countess d'Agoult, too, was vastly upset and wrote a spate of angry letters to Blandine, which got left behind in the Paris apartment and which the Princess Carolyne read and posted on to Liszt. His next actions were totally unreasonable. Instead of confronting the Countess with the letters, he wrote to his daughters and took them to task, as if they were responsible. He copied word for word the offending passages from the letters and answered them as if in a courtroom. This unfortunate letter condemning their mother had the desired effect. Thoroughly confused, the girls overlooked his baseness in reading their mail and stopped communicating with the Countess. (19.394/395) They tried to adjust to Berlin life, but hated it. Blandine fled to Paris a year later and Cosima sought escape through marriage to the son of Mme. Von Bulow. While Liszt loved Hans Von Bulow devotedly, he had doubts about the marriage. The Countess, too, opposed it on the grounds that Cosima was not in love with Von Bulow. Liszt made them wait for two years, but finally they married in 1857. Von Bulow took his bride to honeymoon at Zurich, there to introduce her to his other benefactor, Wagner - a fatal mistake! Blandine married Emile Ollivier two months later and Liszt became very fond of him. His children remained surprisingly devoted:-

"How right it is", wrote Cosima in 1861, "to use the word grandiose for that personality which seems to have been made of love and inspiration. Every time I am here (Weimar), it seems to me that I am renewed ... that I have come back to my homeland, to the place of my soul. I am consumed with incessant wishes for him. I want something great, vague, infinite." (19.398)

Daniel Liszt, the youngest, became a brilliant scholar who would, had he lived, have succeeded at almost any career he chose for himself. While with the Von Bulows, he fell ill. They sent reports of the seriousness of his illness to Weimar. It was the Princess who showed concern, insisting that Liszt visit the boy. He wrote to her on 12 December 1859:-

"You were right to send me here. The doctor has no hope for him." (19.400)

The next night Daniel died of tuberculosis. The Princess was shocked that Liszt failed to get a priest to administer the last sacraments, for which he had no explanation. Cosima handled all the practical aspects of her brother's death, even to watching the body alone.

"Sometimes I feel my heart will burst", she wrote. (19.401)

Anna Liszt, too, was infinitely distressed, but the Countess d'Agoult was busy publishing a letter on Brown at the time of her son's death, and Liszt?

"When I have finished with some works that can't be postponed, Daniel shall have his Requiem."
(19.401)

Such was the quality of their parenthood. Blandine died shortly afterwards in 1882.

Cosima must have been greatly disillusioned by her father's casual attitude at the time of Daniel's death and this may have had some bearing on her defiant attitude towards him when she fell in love with Richard Wagner. Von Bulow lost her to Wagner in 1864, although he only divorced her in 1870 after she had borne Wagner a child. Wagner had craftily arranged, when visiting Ludwig 2 of Bavaria, for Von Bulow to be offered an attractive post in Munich. This gave him ready access to Cosima. He was two years younger than her father. All the affection she had felt for Liszt was now channelled towards her new love - which was to last beyond Wagner's death. When she left Von Bulow, Liszt was entirely on his side. Von Bulow suffered a nervous breakdown because of Cosima's infidelity and Liszt severed relations with her and Wagner for several years. This did not make any difference to them; they later married and had more children. Wagner then made a move to set matters right between himself and Liszt by inviting Liszt's presence at the laying of the foundation stone at Bayreuth. Cosima was still opposed to her father and was against the idea of his coming. Liszt, knowing nothing of this, responded warmly to Wagner's letter and the rift between them was mended, while superficially Cosima seemed reconciled

with her father. Her callous treatment of him, when, after Wagner's death, he went to Bayreuth for the Wagner festival, makes one wonder whether she really had forgiven him. Liszt, now an old man, caught a cold on the long journey, and on arrival, took to bed with a fever and racking cough. He had not been invited to stay with Cosima and his grandchildren and took a room nearby. Though still ill, he attended the first of the Parsival performances three days later, and after that, the performance of Tristan. Cosima was busy organizing the festival and was slow to realize how ill he was. She called in the morning for a few minutes, then left the lodging. The food Liszt was offered was unsuitable for a sick man and he was left alone, neglected, all day, as everyone was at the theatre. On 26 July the doctor was called and banned alcohol. Liszt had for years drunk a moderate amount of brandy and removal of the stimulant did more harm than good. Pupils arriving in Bayreuth called to see him, but Cosima had forbidden visitors. A second doctor was called when Liszt took a turn for the worse, and diagnosed pneumonia. He died on 31 July 1886. His body was transferred to the Villa Wahnfried, (Cosima's home) and his pupils were outraged by the lack of respect shown him, even to his not being given extreme unction. A Lutheran minister was finally called to pronounce benediction - over an Abbe of the Catholic church! His wishes in his will were not carried out. He was not given a Requiem Mass, nor buried in the habit of the Order of St. Francis. He had requested in a note on the scores of Les Morts and La Notte that they be played at his funeral - this was not done. All Bayreuth was celebrating Wagner while Liszt was lowered into the ground. (27.97/98)

Was Cosima too busy doing justice to the fame of her husband to give due accord to Liszt's death - or, like he himself, was she so filled with pride and hurtful memories that she exacted' this small revenge from her father for the injustices he had inflicted on herself, her sister and brother? We shall never know.

Liszt's relationship with the church was equally ambiguous. After a severe illness at the early age of 6, his parents were frightened at the excess of religious zeal he displayed, which seemed strange

in one so young. This showed no sign of abating as the boy grew older. Adam took firm steps to check his son's excessive piety. 'You belong to art, not the church', he said. (5.8)

After his boyish love for his student Caroline St. Cricq was thwarted, Liszt suffered once more from religious mania. He read holy books and lived a life of monkish asceticism. (22.15) One of his few friends at that time was the Abbe Lamennais and they had many theological discussions. Lamennais dissuaded Liszt from consigning himself to a monastery, thinking the young man's religious fervour would not last.

A bizarre friend of that time was Christian Urhan, violinist in the Paris orchestra, who lived a spartan life of very rigid moral principles. He appealed to the mystical side of Liszt's personality and introduced him to Saint-Simonism, whose philosophy of the universal brotherhood of man made a lasting impact on Liszt. His religious feelings were intensified through his friendship with the Abbe Lamennais. Saint Simon's ideas of uniting the flesh and the spirit and sanctifying the one by the other burgeoned and flourished under the influence of Abbe Lamennais. This unfrocked priest had drawn the extreme moral and social conclusions from the principles of liberty and equality. He was denounced by his church for his sympathy with revolutionary Catholics in Ireland, Poland and Belgium - to all intents and purposes, excommunicated. This martyrdom inspired Liszt to even greater admiration. The Abbe's writings and friendship broadened Liszt's horizons. Faith was what the followers of Lamennais offered that was lacking by the Saint Simonists. This allowed Liszt to combine his instinctive piety with his revolutionary ardour. Lamennais, like Saint Simon, was a spiritual refugee from the bloodbath of the French Revolution. Saint Simon spoke only of a 'new Christianity' and wanted nothing to do with the existing church. Lamennais clung to the faith of his fathers. Saint Simon had offered a social mission. Lamennais offered the same, but with religious values that enhanced his teachings. Liszt dreamed of a community whose music was based on altruism and humanity and evoked the vision of an age when:

"National, moral, political and religious songs and canticles rise in the fields, in the woods and villages, in the outskirts, working places and big cities - written for the people, learned by the people, sung by the people; yes, sung by the workers, day-labourers, artisans, boys and girls, men and women of the people ... "
(17.52)

Liszt accepted an invitation to join Lamennais and his small group of disciples at La Chênaie, a manor-house three days journey away. He was greatly stirred by this visit. By the end of 1834, that year, he had composed four remarkable and original works dedicated to Lamennais, who had inspired them. While under the influence of Lamennais, Liszt also wrote an article on 'The Future of Church Music of the Future', appealing to mankind for humanitarian music. However, Lamennais felt that Liszt was too young and unsure of himself to decide on a life of holy seclusion and encouraged him to think that the impulse within him driving him to priesthood could as well serve at the alter of music.

So the young man devoted himself to music. Yet although he maintained all his life to be a true believer, he was notoriously lax in his religious observances. For years he avoided the formalities of mass and the sacraments. He could not go on confessing the same old sin over and over! In the 1840's, he was also initiated into Free Masonry. His religiosity arose from true sentiment but was frequently oratorical and theatrical in its manifestations, always influenced by the humanistic notions of bourgeois free-thinkers. (24.10)
The traces of Saint Simon and Lamennais never quite disappeared from his contradictory world of ideas; they merely paled and were pushed into the background.

Of his youthful attraction to the church, Liszt wrote as an old man in 1862:-

"You know, dearest mother, how, during many of the years of my youth I dreamed myself incessantly into the world of the saints. Nothing seems to me so self-evident as heaven, nothing so true and so rich in blessedness as the goodness and compassion of God. Notwithstanding all

the aberrations and errors of my life, nothing and nobody have ever been able to shake my faith in immortality and eternal salvation; a faith I won by my prayers in the churches of Raiding and Frauendorg, the Saint Vincent de Paule in Paris ... when I now read the lives of the saints, I feel I am meeting again, after a long journey, old and reverend friends from whom I shall never part." (5.7)

But his commitment to the church was only partial. When he entered the priesthood in 1865, Liszt took only four of the seven orders. He could not celebrate mass or hear confession and he took no vows of celibacy. He was free to retract at any time. Door-keeper, reader, acolyte and exorcist, he was an honorary canon as well. In a letter to his mother it is clear he never intended a fuller allegiance:-

"I do not in the least intend to become a monk in the severe sense of the word. For this, I have no vocation." (27.74)

And, to Agnes Klindworth:-

"I think I need hardly tell you that I have not changed to any extent, still less have I forgotten anything. It is only that my life is ordered more simply - and that the Catholic devotion of my childhood has become a regular and guiding sentiment." (17.166)

In a letter to an unknown correspondent just after his ordination, he wrote:-

"Yes, sir, it is true that I have joined the ecclesiastical profession - but not a bit through disgust of the world and less through lassitude for my art." (22.241)

Liszt was thus well aware that the temptations of the world were as attractive to him as previously and was unable to abstain from enjoying them. What is more, with the constant schedule of travelling he undertook, he was enabled to partake of the best of both worlds; religious seclusion in Rome and pleasurable entertainment whilst abroad.

One effect of his entering the church was an increased interest and artistry in composing religious music. Liszt was convinced of the religious origin of music and wrote:-

"The church composer is also preacher and priest and where words cannot suffice to convey the feeling, music gives them wings and transfigures them." (19.92)

and:

"Only in music does feeling actually radiantly present lift the ban which oppresses our spirit with the sufferings of an evil earthly power and liberate us with the white-capped floods of its free and warmth-giving might from 'the demon thought', brushing away for brief moments his yoke from our furrowed brows." (23.110)

This religious fervour resulted in such works as the Graner Mass, a setting of the 13th Psalm, the oratorios Christus and The Legend of St. Eliabeth and many smaller sacred pieces. The oratorios are both massive works with some really beautiful passages. Again, however, worldly influences can be found even in these works of spiritual devotion. St. Elizabeth is unfortunately marred by some tawdry music, e.g. the Crusader's March. Meyerbeer's L'Africaine made a similar appeal to Liszt's senses with its heavy, brassy, Rococo strains, military ensembles, etc. (22.227)

There was yet another inconsistency in Liszt's approach to religion. On the one hand he was a sincere Christian; on the other, Mephistopheles held a strange fascination for him. Remembering Paganini's influence on him, it is probable that another aspect of the violinist's attraction for Liszt was his diabolism. Even serious-minded people believed Paganini to be in cahoots with the devil and to have developed his uncanny powers whilst imprisoned for 20 years with only a broken violin having one string for a plaything. One must also bear in mind that the devil as seen in the Romantic figure of Mephisto, was not so much the embodiment of evil, as a cynical mocker, laughing at the weakness of mankind and the futility of human effort - the character that appealed to the actor in Liszt. Whatever the reason,

Liszt was so enamoured by the idea of Mephisto that he deliberately adopted the part; in his appearance certainly, and with some success. Amy Fay described him thus:-

"He made me think of an old-time magician more than anything ... his mouth turns up at the corners, which gives him a most crafty and Mephistophelian expression when he smiles and his whole appearance and manner have a sort of Jesuitical elegance and ease." (5.63 and 22.267)

Again we find the ambiguity!

His friend and admirer, Monsieur Ingres, saw in his tricks and mannerisms a likeness to Mephisto too. (22.162) Gregorovius wrote of Liszt a few days after he had taken holy orders:-

"Yesterday I saw Liszt clad as an Abbe. He was getting out of a hacknay carriage, his black silk cassock fluttering ironically behind him. Mephistopheles disguised as an Abbe; such is the end of Lovelace." (22.225)

In old age Gregorovius saw Liszt as a burnt out figure of which only the outer walls remained, 'from which a little ghost-like flame hisses forth.' (22.280) Anything sinister about him was, however, dispelled by the benevolence of his expression, which increased with age.

Members of his audiences saw both aspects in Liszt. Mawilda von Meysenberg perceived only the good, as evidenced in her memoirs:-

"Such calm, such spiritual depth irradiated and transfigured his playing as seemed to liberate him from the limitations of the instrument and fill it with a magic I never found in any other pianist I have heard." (17.173)

Berlioz agreed:-

"and the (Beethoven) sonata in C sharp minor, and the light dimmed, and the five listeners lying on the rug in the dark and our magnetization and Legouve's tears and mine and the respectful

silence of Schoelcher ... and my God, my God,
you were sublime that evening." (19.47)

Others, however, saw too, the Mephistophelian element. Hans Andersen, fairy-tale author, heard a Liszt performance in Hamburg:-

"I heard the world-famous Liszt. He reminded me of Hoffmann's 'Little Zaches' in appearance. I found something demonic about him, though a suffering demon that had to use the piano to free his soul. But as he played, his face changed. His eyes flashed. It was very original and strange." (17.100)

Heine mentions:-

"The electrical effect of a daemonic nature on a closely-packed crowd ... these phenomena have never confronted me so distinctly and alarmingly as at Liszt's concert." (5.135)

and:

"I forget what he played, but I would swear it was variations upon themes from the Apocalypse. At first I could scarcely make them out, those four mystical beasts; I only heard their voices, especially the roaring of the lion and the croaking of the eagle ... what he played best was the valley of Jehosophat ... first came Satan galloping in the lists, black-besaddled on a milk-white charger, and, riding slowly behind, Death on her pale horse. Last came Christ in golden armour on a black steed. With his holy lance, he first thrust Satan down, then Death - and the beholders rejoiced loudly." (12.150/151)

Cartoonists, too, saw something of the sorcerer in Liszt. French cartoonist Grandville used a distorting image for his caricature. (17.101)

The more down to earth of Liszt's acquaintances admitted only to his great charisma:

"He possessed enormous, almost magical prestige and a personal magnetism which few men possessed

in like degree", said Saint-Saëns. (25.238)

Others actually attributed to Liszt super-human qualities. Olga Janina said in her strange book that Liszt's fingers were not human fingers. (25.230)

Amy Fay commented:

"It does not seem as if it were music you were listening to, but as if he called up a real, living form and you saw it breathing before your face and eyes. It gives me almost a ghostly feeling to hear him and it seems as if the air were peopled with spirits." (19.204)

A girl attending one of his flood concerts in Vienna used similar words:-

"It was not merely sound I heard; it was life; fiery, deeply-felt, deep-found life!" (17.70)

Siloti wrote:

"A pianist myself, I am yet unable to show how he played ... I cannot say he had a 'big' tone; It was rather that when he played there was no sound of the instrument. He could produce from it ... music such as no-one could form any idea of without hearing it." (19.204)

Heine:

"The piano vanishes ... music appears." (19.204)

Nor was the aura of mysticism surrounding Liszt confined only to his performances. Mr. Sorabji in his book 'Around Music' quotes the waltz from Gounod's Faust as being an absolutely clear instance of possession in music. The theme is so charged by Liszt with his own peculiar quality that ...

"it loses all semblance of its original physiognomy and becomes 'controlled', to use an expression borrowed from spiritualists, or 'possessed'. When the waltz makes its final appearance, it is devilish and fiendishly bedecked and disappears in a crash of thunder." (22.231)

Whatever the truth of these beliefs, Liszt in at least one instance had a presentiment of things to happen in the future. In December 1882 he went to Venice at the Wagners' invitation to spend the winter there with them. He was fascinated by the funeral processions by gondola along the canals and felt suddenly that Wagner himself would soon die and his corpse float down the lagoon similarly. He composed *La Lugubre Gondola I and II* approximately two months before Wagner's death while under the influence of this strange premonition. There are two versions; *Venezia* and *Am Grabe Richard Wagner*. As he had envisaged, Wagner's funeral procession glided down the same Venice canals. (27.93/94)

The diabolical side of Liszt's personality found expression in a number of very unusual pieces. In the second volume of *Years of Pilgrimage* is the *Dante Symphony*, portraying in music Dante's description of his descent into hell. It is in three parts; *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. Strange tongues, horrible cries, words of pain and anger are expressed. An air of damnation hangs over it and imagery is of vortex and whirlwind. (22.66) The orchestration is grotesque, only relieved by the closing choral *magnificat*. His *Faust Symphony* also has three movements with titles *Faust*, *Gretchen* and *Mephistopheles*. The music acts the chosen roles and does not imitate them. (22.164) A piece written in 1855 is *Totentanz*, in the form of variations upon the *Dies Irae* and inspired by the frescos of *Orcana* in the *Campo Santo* at *Pisa*. Its shuddering, clanking rhythms and sounds of dancing bones are extremely weird and it had to wait until 1881 for its first performance by *Siloti* in *Antwerp* - more than 30 years before anyone was venturesome enough to present it.

Two other works in the same vein were published in 1862 - the two episodes from *Lenau's Faust* entitled '*Night Ride*' and '*Dance in the Village Inn*'. The first piece starts with an invocation of a dark, gloomy spring night of warm breezes and rustling trees. *Nightingales* sing. *Faust* enters on horseback. Lights show through the trees - there is distant religious singing. *Faust*, alone again, cries bitterly into the mane of his horse. This strange scene

is aptly depicted in the music. The second piece is sometimes known as the Mephisto Waltz. The scene is a village inn, which Faust and Mephisto enter in search of love on hearing the music from inside. Peasants are dancing. The attention of Faust is drawn to the landlord's daughter, serving drinks to the customers. Mephisto seizes the violin and his playing bewitches the dancers, who abandon themselves under the influence of his playing. As the dancing continues, a nightingale is heard singing in the woods. Mephisto continues playing, while the dancers disappear two by two into the dark. The landlord's daughter throws herself into Faust's arms and they, too, vanish into the wood. Strange topics indeed from which a man of the cloth should draw inspiration!

He wrote three other Mephisto Waltzes in addition to the one from Faust, as also a Mephisto Polka in 1884, whimsical and scherzando. His Csardas Macabre is one of a series of 'dances macabres', but stems from Liszt's old age and the macabre element is no longer picturesquely theatrical as in Totentanz. His Csardas Obstine and Csardas Macabre are akin to the Mephisto Waltzes in their relentless rhythms. The Valse Oubileë is also a late work, characterized by a supremely elegant and slightly diabolical air of seduction in keeping with Liszt's personality that attracted the favours of the fair sex up to the very end.

It is strangely ironic that the works arising from the darker side of Liszt's nature should have enjoyed more success than those stemming from his religiosity. For example, of his Graner Mass composed for the inauguration of Estergom Cathedral, Liszt wrote to Wagner:-

"I prayed it more than composed." (17.142)

Yet when he visited Paris to attend a performance of the mass, it was not well received. Berlioz walked out, saying it was 'a negation of art'. (22.236)

One wonders how Liszt came to terms with the many contradictory

aspects of his personality. Was he aware that they were often irrational? If so, there is no evidence that he attempted to modify or reconcile them. It seems, rather, that Liszt chose resolutely to turn his back on those elements that were untenable and acknowledge only those he could comfortably live with.

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L'ABBÉ LISZT



F. LISZT - STRENGTH ... OR ARROGANCE?



Chapter V

FINALLY - RESIGNATION ... DOGGED PERSEVERANCE

... HOPEFUL OPTIMISM

"The main thing is to persevere ... I sometimes have grave doubts about composing further. Yet I will not give up though I doubt if I can express what is hovering in my innermost self."

(Liszt, in a letter to Abranyi,
September 1878. [17.196])

The many disappointments of his lifetime had a cumulative effect upon Liszt so that, in his own words, 'exuberance of heart' gave way to 'bitterness of heart'. (29.234) He had been frustrated in his ambitions at Weimar, culminating in the indignity of having a demonstration at his performance of 'The Barber of Bagdad', 1858; his friendship with Wagner came to a temporary end in 1859; Princess Carolyne was spurned by the Weimar Court; the deaths of his son, Daniel, 1859, and daughter, Blandine, 1862, left their mark upon him; he was undermined by the wounding manifesto against the New German School of composition, 1860; he felt desolate when Princess Carolyne's daughter married and went to live in Vienna; and, most of all, he was saddened by the lack of appreciation of his compositions.

He wrote in a letter to Von Herbeck:-

"With regard to performances of my work, generally my disposition and inclination are more than ever completely in the negative. It seems to me now high time that I should be forgotten."
(27.91)

Thus a mood of bleak resignation settled upon Liszt and he turned more surely towards the comfort of religion. There was little solace to be found in the attitude of his friends, who, like Wagner, were disappointed in his later compositions. Wagner referred to these as:-

"the illustration of a world in decline", with "decadent Paris", which he so hated, as its centre. (24.234)

This comes to us through Cosima. This comment, seen in the light of these late pieces showing a decline in tonality bears some truth and is more easily understood.

The public was equally unsympathetic in regard to many of Liszt's works. In 1866 a performance of the Graner Mass in the church of St. Eustache met with a poor reception.

"The poor execution of the Gran Mass and the spate of words which followed, left a painful impression on me"

wrote Liszt in a letter to Saint-Saëns. (17.167)

Liszt's disillusionment in regard to the lack of understanding shown his compositions was great. He wrote to Jessie Laussot:-

"Knowing by experience with how little favour my works meet, I have been obliged to force a sort of systematic heedlessness on myself with regard to them and a resigned passiveness. Thus, during my years of foreign activity in Germany, I constantly observed the rule of never asking anyone whatsoever to have any of my works performed. More than that, I plainly dissuaded many persons from doing so who showed some intention of this kind - and I shall do the same elsewhere."
(27.92)

After the manifesto against the 'new music' was printed, he retired once and for all from the struggle to adjust to the German spirit. With a single exception of an article published on Robert Franz in 1872, he ceased to write.

From 1866 onwards, Liszt became convinced of the futility of so many of his efforts. After visiting Hungary where he attended the crowning of Franz Joseph, he returned to Rome in a state of increasing indifference. His big ambitions had faded. He was losing faith in everything except religion. His pride was hurt to the point where he said of his compositions:-

"I do not care to force them upon them. (people)
(22.239/240)

His bitterness is apparent in a letter to Princess Carolyne, in which he wrote:-

"I see increasingly clearly what a sad business it is to have ideas in this world ... ideas which are not everyone's ideas - and how painful is the position of a musician of my sort. But, however it falls out, I mean to do what I must."
(17.220)

Liszt turned for solace to the future, not the past. In a letter to Abranyi he spoke of the 'great consolation' he found in Wagner's masterpieces. (17.196)

Nor were the disappointments over. The church music into which he poured his renewed religious zeal was found by the church to be unsuitable for liturgical use. Also, in his last years, his health began to fade. A severe fall left him with a limp for several weeks, his eyesight was failing and he was easily fatigued. Despite his wide travelling in old age, he lived a life of surprising isolation unrelated to the honour accorded his memory. From Stradal we learn that Liszt was practically forgotten in Budapest in 1885/86. At a time when his statue adorned the front of the Budapest opera house, he was ostentatiously ignored in Hungary's musical life. While being paid a certain official homage, he lived in an atmosphere of incomprehension and indifference. (24.9) Yet his indomitable spirit was far from being quenched. He said cynically of his own music:-

"I was the poisoned mushrooms and ... I had
at my side, my antidote of milk."

(a reference to music of past
eras. [22.288])

La Charivari realized that, far from being the down-trodden composer he portrayed, Liszt was still full of vitality and rebellion. In 1877 he described Liszt's profile as that of a Mephistopheles

"who, touched by the death of Marguerite, was meditating a slow conversion."

Liszt, he said, feigned an aged, impoverished air,

"But do not believe in it - it is merely the affectation of humility and his cassock can scarcely contain the bounding of his still youthful soul." (20.191)

Despite the lack of appreciation of his works, Liszt did not allow his public or his friends to dissuade him from composing. He merely found a new genre for expression of his new emotions. He was too much a part of the Romantic age, too wilful and disdainful, to accept the humility being imposed on him without some show of spirit. Even in his mood of resignation he was conspicuous. His inspiration now found a vehicle in funeral pieces. Szabolcsi finds a picturesque way of putting it:-

"Liszt, the world's wayfarer, has long detected the seasons' hidden sorrow and reveals it in a new palette." (24.48)

Earlier he had written moving threnodies for the revolutionaries who had died in Hungary - 'Funerailles' and 'Heroide Funebre'. In 1860 his 'Les Morts' from the Trois Odes Funebres, was in memory of Daniel, based on a prose passage of Lamennais. The second, 'La Notte', 1864, appeared two years after the death of Blandine. The third was written as an epilogue to Tasso.

The unpopularity of his late compositions could be attributed to their brooding, dismal atmosphere. They had become more swirling and nightmarish, more demonic and threatening than any music before. (24.40) No doubt death poetry played an important part in this change of direction, and the famous Fresco of Camposanta of Pisa inspired him to compose a Danse Macabre Concerto. Liszt was much preoccupied with the idea of death following the demise of his children and Wagner.

He was now writing for himself and not his public. From a letter of 14 July 1869, to Saint-Saëns, we learn that Liszt had ceased writing for other people.

"At my age the business of being a young composer is no longer appropriate and there would be no other for me in Paris as I could not carry on indefinitely that of the veteran pianist on the invalid list. Therefore I have resolved not to concern myself with my compositions excepting to write them without any thought of spreading them abroad. If they have any real value, it will be found out soon enough, either during my life or afterwards. The sympathy of my friends, who I flatter myself are very well chosen, is amply sufficient for me. The rest of the world may say what it will." (25.245)

He said defiantly, 'I can wait!' (21.120), as indeed he has had to, for it is only in recent years that the real significance of the works of his final period has become apparent.

In the spring of 1885, a young pianist was reading passages from Schopenhauer's 'Parerga' to Liszt. Having listened to the famous simile where the pyrotechnist finds that the spectators to whom he has displayed the most beautiful fireworks are all blind, Liszt sighed heavily. He equated his own feelings with those of the pyrotechnist, adding that his own blind 'spectators' might still be blessed with the gift of sight. A year before he died he was still hopeful of his works being appreciated. Showing a pupil the route through which Tasso's body had been carried in splendrous procession to the Capital, he said:-

"I shall not be carried in triumph to the Capitol, but the time will come when my works will be appreciated. True, it will be late for me because then I shall no longer abide with you." (24.5)

Thus even at the end of his life when Liszt had become resigned to disappointment, he had foresight enough to predict success for his compositions, despite their total lack of appeal to his own

generation. It is only a great personality who could have looked beyond the mire and fixed his sight single-mindedly upon a vision so uplifting that he could be filled with optimism. Borodin's correspondence of 1878/1883 reveals the wonder men felt in Liszt's presence:-

"It is hardly believable how young the soul of this silver-haired old man is; how profoundly and from how many angles he looks upon art. How much his artistic pretentiousness surpasses that of most contemporaries and the members of the young generation ... how far he is from all national, scholastic or other prejudices."
(24.32/33)

Liszt, a mass of contradictions; not easily understood. Beckett must be given the last word on this lovable enigma, for he expressed so clearly what anyone who has made a study of Liszt's personality must feel:-

"The difficulty of coming to a precise conclusion upon the complex and contradictory character of Liszt is almost insuperable and I still hope that this vivid personality has not yet lost the power of creating dissention even among his admirers." (5. Foreword v)

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F. LISZT - GROWING OLDER.



F. LISZT — THE OLD MAN .



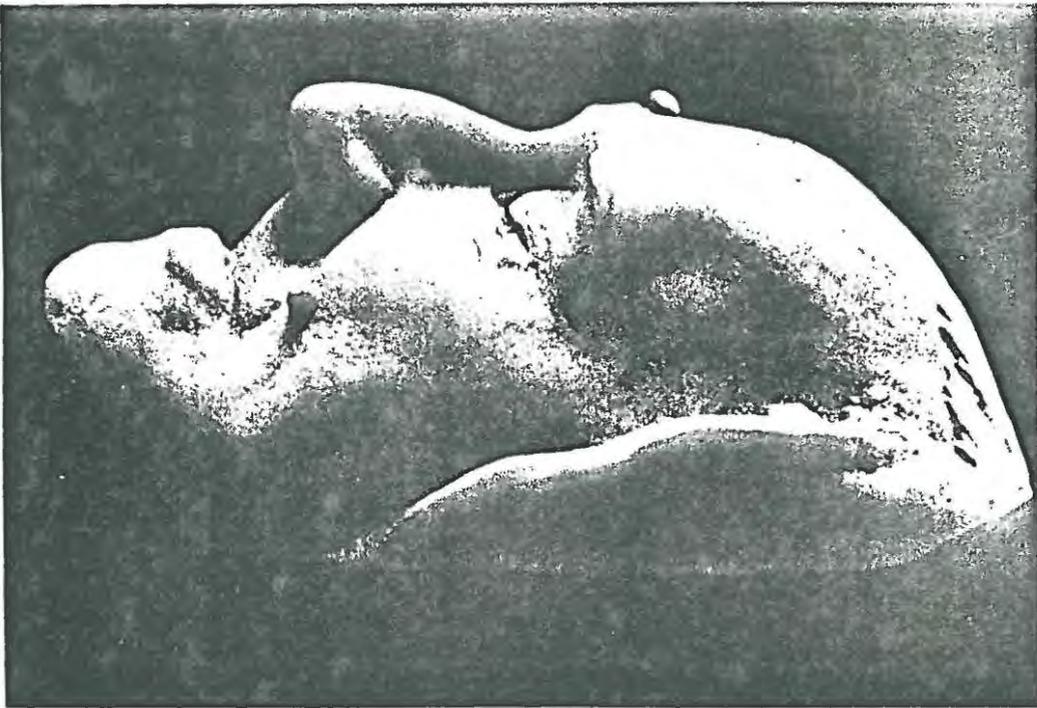
F. LISZT - FROM THE LAST PHOTOGRAPHS.



F. LISZT — THE END.



LISZT ON HIS DEATHBED.



DEATHMASK OF LISZT

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