

Prairie U-U Society, May 9, 1999
Franz Liszt, A Really Romantic Composer

1. Recorded Prelude, "Tasso, Lamento E Trionfo"

(a) Welcome, Nancy.

Chalice lighting, Warren: in honor of the mother of Franz Liszt, my mother, your mothers, and everyone's mother.

Joys and Sorrows, Nancy

2. Hungarian Rhapsody, No. 2 — Doleta clarinet, Carl Wacker piano

A. When Franz Liszt was a little boy in Hungary, he heard lots of Gypsy music, and what you just heard was probably inspired by it. Doleta is dressed up like a Gypsy woman. The Gypsies are a people found all over the world. At first Europeans thought they came from Egypt, which is why they are called Gypsies, but now we know they came from somewhere in India, many hundreds of years ago. They have a distinct language of their own, Romany, and I think they want to be called by that language rather than Gypsies. Many of them are wanderers, never settling down in any one place. They peddle goods to people, play their music for people to listen to and dance to, and some of them are fortune tellers. (Are there any in Madison?) Many people who were not Gypsies thought it would be nice to be a Gypsy, just because you weren't tied down and could pick up and leave when you wanted to, and play music for people and get paid for it. Other people disliked the Gypsies, partly just because they were wanderers. Adolf Hitler and the Nazis wanted to kill all the Gypsies, but they couldn't. In many countries today people try to hurt the Gypsies. But I'm sure the Gypsies will survive, partly because so many other people like their music and admire their freedom.

(Children leave for RE.)

3. Reading: Faust, MacIntyre trans., pp. 50-52. Mephistopheles by George Calden, Faust by Warren.

Mephistopheles is making his second visit to Faust in his study, and our excerpt starts in the middle of the scene. Mephistopheles is saying, "I'm not a high ranking devil..." And the scene concludes with Faust saying "...and time come to an end, for all of me."

A. Franz Liszt was born in 1811 in a German speaking region in Hungary. He always identified himself as a Hungarian, although he might have been the single most cosmopolitan person in Europe. But he was a Hungarian who never learned Magyar and couldn't speak to the peasants, that is, the vast majority of the people. He wrote many allegedly Hungarian melodies, but they were usually based on Gypsy music, and the Gypsies were often reworking middle class and upper class European music. Bela Bartok (sort of a Unitarian) really invented Hungarian ethnomusicology. But he was sympathetic to Liszt and wrote this about his effort: Watson, p. 234 middle. (Apologize to Carl and Doleta?)

Franz' musical talents were recognized early by his parents, and when he was 11 they moved to Vienna so that he could study piano and composition, with, among others, Salieri, the old rival of Mozart.

Most of his early compositions were for the piano. Frequently he wrote adaptations of the music of other composers, especially orchestral works. In those days before records, a good pianist with Liszt's music could give audiences an idea of what symphonies by composers like Beethoven were like.

Our first number is one of his piano pieces. He wrote three "Liebestraum," and I'm not sure which one this is. It might have been the one he played in his last public performance. But each of them is expressive music, written to express aspects of love.

4. "Liebestraum," Aileen Nettleton

B. Liszt was another of those child prodigies, fantastically gifted at the piano. As a teenager he traveled around Europe with one or both of his parents, performing for the elites, like George IV of England, and larger audiences. In 1827 his father died in Boulogne, and he retreated to Paris, where his mother joined him. In 1828 he began a passionate affair with a pupil from an upper class family, Caroline de Saint-Cricq.....which probably didn't come to physical completion. But her father put an end to it and forbade her to see him. She was married off to an older upper class man and had an unhappy marriage. Liszt was crushed and really depressed for some time. He searched around for consolation in religion and literature. Like many prodigies, his formal education was quite limited, and he was in many ways self-educated. He never forgot Caroline. They visited in 1844, 16 years later, and when she died in 1872 he was again crushed.

Paris was Liszt's base for a number of years. He met Heinrich Heine, Victor Hugo, and Lamartine, among others. He became friends with Hector Berlioz, befriended Frederick Chopin and Felix Mendelssohn, and was inspired by Paganini.

Our next number is a setting of a Victor Hugo poem. The order of service indicates the date of composition as 1842-1859: Liszt was continually revising his earlier compositions.

5. "O Quand de Jours," Paula Pachiarz with Carl Wacker

C. After the revolution in Paris in 1830 Liszt fell in with the Saint-Simonians. This is especially interesting to me as a sociologist. Henri St.-Simon was a French intellectual among the founders of sociology. His student and assistant, Auguste Comte, gave sociology its name. The Saint-Simonians were a movement something like the American Technocrats of the 1930s.....somewhere between socialism and capitalism, but the idea was that us positive scientists should be running things. They really were concerned with the conditions of the poor and the working class, and Liszt was as well. (In 1880 he still expressed that concern, "All social institutions must aim at improving the the moral and material condition of the most populous and poorest class.") The Saint-Simonians weren't religious, but were not especially hostile to the Catholic Church. Liszt was more or less Catholic throughout his life and could combine his Catholicism with his liberal friends. But, then, throughout his life he could reconcile opposites. He seemed to lack intellectual and moral convictions.

In 1833 he fell in love with a married woman, the Comtesse Marie d'Agoult, 28 years olds, unhappily married to a man 15 years older, with two children. In 1835 Franz and Marie eloped to Switzerland, where they had a daughter. In 1836 he met George Sand, the English novelist, and introduced her to Frederick Chopin.

It was a kind of hippie or Beatnik life. Let me quote from his biography about their stay in

Chamonix, Switzerland. Watson p. 39 bottom through p. 41, para. 1.

With Marie, Franz had three children, Blondine, Daniel, and Cosima. She tired of the hippy life and wanted to settle down. He promised to do so, but in his Faust-like way repeatedly broke his promises and went off on performing tours around Europe. They split, Marie returned to Paris. Franz' mother too was there and was important in rearing the 3 children.

As a performer Liszt became fantastically famous, something like the Beatles of his day....although I think Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones is a better analogy. He played before Queen Victoria in 1840, was a sensation in Berlin in 1842. In 1844 he had an affair with Lola Montez, an Irish adventuress who was on her way to becoming the mistress of the King of Bavaria. (The affair might have helped produce a final break with Marie d'Agoult.)

I'm not sure which of his loves he was thinking about when he wrote the following number, but I'm sure it was one of them, the singular is justified.

6. "Ich liebe dich" — Barbara Park and Linda Sheehy

D. In 1846-47 he toured through Istanbul and Eastern Europe. In 1847 he met Princess Carolyn zu Sayne-Wittgenstein in Kiev.

Quote Watson, p. 76 bottom para. To p. 77 top para., browse pp.79f.

They settled in Weimar, Goethe's old town, then a rather minor town in Germany. Although she couldn't get most of her wealth out of Russia, she got enough. Enough so that Franz this time really did abandon his performing career. After 1847 (age 36!) he never again performed in public for pay.

In 1848 there was revolution in Europe. Richard Wagner, who Liszt had met earlier, was active in the revolution in Leipzig and had to flee. Liszt helped him flee..

In 1851 Hans von Bulow became his student, a favorite student.

In 1853 he was still seeing his children in Paris, in the company of Princess Carolyn.

In 1854 he had a very discreet affair with an Englishwoman, Agnes Street.

In 1857 his daughter Cosima married Hans von Bulow.

In 1859 he became estranged from Richard Wagner. From what I know about Wagner, it would have been easy to be estranged from him, but Liszt also became estranged from most of the musicians he had been friends with, people like Berlioz. He seems to have been generous to his musician friends; e.g., he organized a Berlioz week in Weimar in 1852. But I don't think they trusted this Faust-like figure any more than Marie d'Agoult did. His son Daniel died in 1859.

He was involved in a nasty journalistic dispute with composers like Brahms, with von Bulow championing his music and those of others as the "new music." He was still famous, and performed (without pay) before Louis Bonaparte, Napoleon III, in Paris in 1861. But the next piece might reflect his mood about then.

6. "Der du von dem Himmel bist," Warren with Doleta

(I found it difficult to translate this German. Rosemarie Lester helped but isn't responsible. If I had heard her correctly, I think, the "You" in the first line would have been "Peace;" in German pronouns can refer to nouns like "Friede" later in the sentence. In this case, "You" doesn't refer to another woman.....I think.)

E. Liszt toyed with the idea of getting married to Princess Carolyn, but didn't. They continued

to collaborate in writing.....her works evidently appeared under his name, and her prolix and convoluted style hurt his style.

He really was devoted to Princess Carolyn until his death. But, even at the age of 60, he still got entangled with another woman. Olga Janina was a Pole, an adventuress, but also a good pianist, who became a student of Liszt in 1869. She was rather crazy, and after some reverses tried to kill Liszt and herself in 1871. She failed, but she went on to write a nasty novel about their affair.

Liszt's daughter Cosima betrayed Hans von Bulow and began an affair with Richard Wagner and married him, against Franz's wishes, in 1870. But they all became reconciled a couple of years later, in 1872.

Liszt could never settle down. In 1869 he started an annual return that lasted until his death 17 years later, 1/3 of the year in Weimar, 1/3 in Budapest, 1/3 in Rome and its environs.

Liszt started an affair with the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church as early as 1863. He became a friend of a German archbishop. Hoehenlohe. He took minor orders in the Church, was an honorary canon in an Italian town in 1879. He wrote church music. I don't know how seriously the hierarchy of the Church took him... For example, suppose today, Mick Jagger converted to Catholicism. The Church would certainly display him, but would they trust him? I think not, and that's what happened to Liszt. Our final piece was an attempt by him to combine traditional church music with modern chromaticism. (I don't understand the chromaticism stuff, it sounds ancient to me.... ?) He contributed this to the church, but it wasn't published. It came to life after he died and was first performed in 1929.

6. "Via Crucis", Prairie Choir, Barb Park director

Warren's afterward: So, did Franz Liszt ever say to any moment, "Linger a while, you are so wonderful...."? I don't think so. He kept moving, and striving, and I don't think Mephistopheles has him now.

Offering. Introduction of guests and visitors. Announcements

Reprise: Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2, Doleta and Carl