GOING BEHIND THE NOTES: EXPLORING THE GREAT PIANO COMPOSERS
AN 8-PART LECTURE CONCERT SERIES

FRANZ LISZT: SPIRITUAL SEEKER

Dr. George Fee
www.dersnah-fee.com

Performance: Sancta Dorothea (1877)

Liszt's Life (1811-1886)
Liszt's Music

Performance: Petrarch Sonnet No. 104 (1855)

The Man Liszt
Fact vs. Fiction

Performance: Transcription of Robert Schumann's Widmung (1848)

10 Minute Break

Playing Liszt's Music
Liszt's Later Years
Liszt's Late Piano Music

Performance: Five Hungarian Folk Songs (1873)
Csárdás obstiné (1884)

Performance: La Lugubre Gondola no.2 (1882)

Liszt's Philosophy of Music
c

Performance: Les jeux d'eaux a la Villa d'Este (1877)

Performance: Sursum Corda (1877)

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED READING ON LISZT

Walker, Alan. Franz Liszt. Alfred A. Knopf, Vol. 1, 1983; Vol. 2, 1989; Vol. 3, 1996.

LISZT'S MOST SIGNIFICANT PIANO WORKS

Annees de pelerinage (Years of Pilgrimage)
1st year: Switzerland 2nd year: Italy 3rd year: Italy
Ballade #2
Funerailles
Two Legends: #1 St.Francis of Assisi's Sermon to the Birds; #2 St.Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves
Mephisto Waltz #1
Sonata in B Minor

LISZT'S BEST KNOWN NON- SOLO PIANO WORKS

13 Symphonic Poems (especially #3 ," Les Preludes")
A Faust Symphony
Piano Concerti in E Flat Major and A Major

Petrarch Sonnet 104

I find no peace, and yet I make no war:
and fear, and hope: and burn, and I am ice
and fly above the sky, and fall to earth,
and clutch at nothing, and embrace the world.

One imprisons me, who neither frees nor jails me,
nor keeps me to herself nor slips the noose:
and Love does not destroy me, and does not loose me,
wishes me not to live, but does not remove my bar.

I see without eyes, and have no tongue, but cry
and long to perish, yet I beg for aid:
and hold myself in hate, and love another.

I feed on sadness, laughing weep:
death and life displease me equally:
and I am in this state, lady, because of you.

Widmung (Dedication)

You my soul, you my heart,
You my rapture, O you my pain,
You my world in which I live,
My heaven you, to which I aspire,
O you my grave, into which
My grief forever I've consigned!
You are repose, you are peace,
You are bestowed on me from heaven.
Your love for me gives me my worth,
Your eyes transfigure me in mine,
You raise me lovingly above myself,
My guardian angel, my better self.

FRANZ LISZT:SPIRITUAL SEEKER

PERFORM: Sancta Dorothea

Sancta Dorothea was a virgin saint who was martyred in the fourth century. She is associated with flowers and her feast day is celebrated on February 6, the date upon which Liszt's mother died. This piece is one of Liszt's late works, composed when he was 66. It is not the kind piece you associate with Liszt, is it? Are you puzzled that I begin with a religious piece? I don't think you will find this puzzling by the end of our time together today.

Liszt's Life (1811-1886)

Franciscus Liszt was born in 1811 in the low-lying marshlands of the Bürgenland, an area which had been part of Hungary for 1000 years, and very close to where Haydn had been born 79 years before, Today it lies in the easternmost part of Austria. Liszt was a fourth-generation Hungarian, with his ancestors having been Austrians. The family name was List, L-I-S-T, the German word for flour.

His father, Adam, was a low -level administrator on the Esterhazy estate, the same royal family which had employed Haydn. He worked as bookkeeper and accountant, doing tasks such as compiling an accurate count of the approximately 50,000 sheep on the large estate.

Liszt's mother, Anna, was an extremely loving and devoted mother to her only child. It was unusual to have only one child in those days, and I do not know of any other major composer who was an only child. I believe that Liszt's being an only child could have been a significant factor in his developing a strong and unique personality.

Liszt's father greatly loved music and had even played the cello in one of Haydn's orchestras. He taught his son the basics of piano, stressing the importance of sight reading and improvisation. He even encouraged memorization of music, something which was not done in those days. Liszt would become the supreme practitioner of each of these three skills.

Evidencing extraordinary talent, it became obvious that Franz needed to be in a major musical center. At age 11 he and his father set off for Vienna where, for 14 months, he studied with Beethoven's disciple, Czerny. Czerny was so impressed with Franz, that he taught him every evening at no charge. At one point, the young lad was taken to meet the great Beethoven, who made a profound impression on him.

Paris was the next destination, and Franz appeared in numerous concerts after his arrival at age 12. With his father having abandoned his job to fully devote himself to his son's talent, Franz became the family breadwinner by playing concerts. Though older than the young Mozart when they both began performing, there was a similarity in the audience responses to the sweetness, innocence, and endearing goodness of the youths. When Franz was 16 his father suddenly died at age 51 from typhoid fever. Franz then brought his mother to Paris where he supported the two of them by teaching lessons to the daughters of the Parisian aristocracy for over 12 hours a day. Anna Liszt would be lovingly provided for by her son for the next 40 years.

Piano playing was becoming the rage in Paris at this time. Although the city was loaded with aspiring virtuoso pianists, Liszt established himself as the dominant pianist.

In 1833, at the age of 22, Liszt and the attractive blond Countess Marie d'Agoult, who was 28, fell in love. Two years later Marie was pregnant, and they felt it wise to leave Paris. They spent the next four years in Switzerland, Milan, Venice, Florence, and Rome.

In many ways, life seemed idyllic. Liszt had established himself as the king of pianists in Paris which meant being the reigning pianist of the world. Marie had much inherited wealth. He and Marie could revel in beautiful nature, read great literature together, and frequent the museums of Italy seeing firsthand some of the greatest works of art ever created.

Marie could not have been more content. She had Franz all to herself and three children were eventually born. Her life seemed complete. She could be the muse for Liszt's composing, and they could stay out of the public eye. She even took pride in having taken away what she termed Liszt's "joy of being useful to others and of doing good," saying " he has given them all up without even realizing, apparently, that he has done so."

However, Franz was not satisfied. To him life was about service to others. It was about giving to the world. Living a self-centered life did not fulfill his deepest needs.

In the spring of 1838, the worst disaster to strike Hungary in modern times occurred, with massive flooding of the Danube River. One morning when Liszt was having coffee in the Piazza San Marco in Venice, he read in a newspaper of the catastrophe in Hungary. He immediately felt it was his duty to do what he could to aid in the crisis. After all, Hungary was his homeland and he realized that by performing concerts he could raise money which could be donated to the relief efforts.

Off he went, leaving Marie a very disgruntled, unhappy camper. However, it was a concert tour of only a few months. After a year back with Marie in Italy, it kept gnawing at him that he should be fulfilling his destiny as a concert artist and not lounging around. "Will my life be forever tainted with this idle uselessness which weighs upon me?" He learned that funds were being collected for a monument to Beethoven in Bonn, and that only a paltry amount so far had been received. Determined to pay the balance himself, he set out on tour again, this time leaving an even more distraught Marie. It would turn into an eight- year odyssey of crisscrossing all of Europe. By the way, he did almost single-handedly subsidize the Beethoven monument.

It is astounding how much travel Liszt undertook during these years, and of course it was almost entirely by stagecoach. He performed everywhere in Europe – from Ireland, to Gibraltar, to St. Petersburg, to Constantinople. He played three or four concerts per week resulting in well over 1,000 concerts. Many of his concerts were held around noontime, and he would then be off to the next destination. He was taking great music to the masses for the first time in history, sometimes playing for as many as 3,000 people at one time. Being the first pianist to ever play alone in a concert, it was Liszt who invented the solo piano concert. He even had the audacity and creativity to call it a "recital." To the dismay of pianists ever since, he was the first musician in history known to perform in public playing

from memory. He also was the first to place the grand piano so that the lid would project the sound out to the audience and would also reveal the player's profile to the audience.

Liszt played on whatever piano was available, which was frequently a horrible, spindly, decrepit instrument. He played a gargantuan amount of different music – some pieces because he wanted the listeners to become acquainted with them, and some because he knew they would respond enthusiastically and want to attend more piano recitals. His own hundreds of transcriptions of songs and his opera paraphrases opened new vistas for listeners. He kept only a small portion of the huge amount of money that he took in, giving nearly all of it to an infinite number of charities.

Liszt could have continued touring for the rest of his life, basking in ego gratification, and continuously raising more money to give to charities. In 1847 he was still only 36 years old. But he yearned for more out of life and wanted to advance the cause of music by composing significant orchestral and choral works. Therefore, he retired from touring and never again in his life would he keep any income from a performance.

Liszt assumed the full-time musical directorship in Weimar in 1848. Although Weimar was a small German town of only 12,000, it had the illustrious heritage of having been the home of Goethe and Schiller several decades earlier. Everything initially seemed as if it should work out well. It did not. Liszt, a devout Roman Catholic, found himself in an overwhelmingly Protestant area of Germany, and we easily forget today that religious animosity was rampant in so many parts of Europe in those times. Liszt's relationship with Marie had begun to fray shortly after his transcontinental concert tours had commenced, and she ended their relationship in 1844. The three children were sent to Paris to be raised by Liszt's mother.

Liszt had met the Russian princess, Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein in 1847, and she, though legally still married, moved to Weimar to live with Liszt. This did not sit well with the locals. Liszt had visions of making Weimar the center of the "music of the future." But he never received the cooperation and support needed from his employers, and during his 13 years in Weimar, he became increasingly frustrated and miserable and realized that he had to leave.

At age 50, Liszt found himself living in Rome, which at that time had a population of 215,000, about the size of Grand Rapids, MI. Rome would become his base for the rest of his life. He lived in very tiny, spartan quarters for most of the next 25 years. For five of those years he lived in a 12' by 15'room at a monastery, with only a bed, a table, a bookcase, and an upright piano which had some keys that did not even play.

Liszt earned virtually no income after he stopped concertizing at age 36. His Weimar salary was ludicrously small, and he termed it "cigar money." Through his whole life, he received only negligible royalties from his compositions. He never took any income from teaching after he was 25 years old. Fortunately, during his touring years he had invested his funds with his good friends, the Rothschilds of Paris. The only way that he survived financially was that they invested it astutely for him over the next decades, including in stocks such as the American railroad. Over the rest of his life, they had to

continually warn Liszt how much he was running down his account because he kept giving away so much.

Liszt's efforts to contribute to the cause of Roman Catholic church music were not fully welcomed in Rome and once again his noble, selfless ideals and efforts were frustrated. However, he was now living where he wanted to live, at the epicenter of the Roman Catholic Church. "Here the air is more pure, heaven more open, and God more accessible!"

Paris had been his home from the age of 12 until 24 and remained his base until age 37. French always remained the language in which he preferred to write and speak, although it is interesting that he usually signed his name simply as "F. Liszt." His sympathies during the Franco – Prussian war were with France, and not with Germany.

He spent his years from age 37 to 50 in Germany. But Germany never felt like home. His true home had always been, and always would be, the Roman Catholic Church. He savored hearing the many church bells of Rome and being near the many churches which meant so much to him. He also enjoyed sharing cognac with the cardinals and other high-ranking Vatican officials. There were even occasions when he visited with Pope Pius IX and Pope Leo XIII.

In 1869 Weimar begged Liszt to return for a few months a year to teach piano master classes in which the outstanding pianists of the world would play for him in a group setting. These were held Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 3:30 to 6 PM. He accepted no income but was provided a housekeeper and a residence. The residence, while not large, was furnished very opulently. When Liszt first beheld it, he complained, saying that this was how Wagner lived but that he was used to his tiny little spartan quarters in Rome.

Liszt's teaching in Weimar for the next 17 years was pivotal in the history of piano playing. It was primarily here that Liszt transmitted his legacy to pianists who would themselves tour the world and teach at the world's leading conservatories. Today's pianists who have a resume of significant teachers can nearly all claim to be a musical descendent of Liszt because of the great pianists who were in attendance at those classes in Weimar and who went on to teach future generations of pianists. Many of you are descendants of Liszt, through my wife or me, or other teachers. Liszt was very benevolent and paternal to the students as people, although in the classes he could be very caustic to those who displayed egotism, played with superficial, mindless facility, or lacked basic musicianship.

Liszt's residence in Weimar can still be visited and it is furnished exactly as it was when Liszt last stayed there. It was one of the great experiences of my musical life to sit at Liszt's piano and play his B Minor Sonata.

In 1875, when Liszt was 64, the Hungarians asked him to reside in Budapest for some months of the year and serve as president of the newly founded Conservatory, which today bears his name. Liszt believed it was his duty to accept and did so, writing that "any particular personal inconvenience I suffer are of no account: the only thing that matters is to do what must be done, the way it should be done."

As he was doing in Weimar, he taught master classes four days a week from 4 to 6 PM, again all gratis, and in return for his presidency duties he only accepted an apartment, which can still be visited today.

These were not the only places to which Liszt traveled outside of Rome. He was in demand all over Europe to perform benefit concerts and to conduct his choral compositions. He traveled at least 4,000 railroad miles every year, all in third-class railroad cars, and usually at night so that the days could be utilized for work.

In the last several years of his life, Liszt suffered from congestive heart failure. The swelling in his legs and feet was so extreme that he was only able to wear slippers. He suffered a bad fall when he was 70, and as a result, his walking became seriously impacted for the rest of his life. His eyesight deteriorated so much that he could hardly read any musical notes and was barely able to read letters or answer his extensive correspondence. However, he valiantly forged on until his death, never complaining to others about his health, other than to make lighthearted, self-deprecating remarks about the aging process.

Liszt's Music

People often do not realize the huge quantity of Liszt's total musical output – over 1300 works. Very few people, including professional musicians, know that a very large percentage of his works consist of church music.

Liszt was a pioneer in creating music which was autobiographical, reflecting his own life experiences and thoughts. Nature, art, and literature were conscious stimuli for his music, and he and Robert Schumann were innovators in this respect.

Liszt's music explores the heights and depths of life, and every emotion in life can be found in it. Liszt's music is frequently highly dramatic. The essence of drama is struggle and much of his music can be viewed as a struggle between darkness and light.

Liszt had a lifelong fascination with the diabolical and the macabre. One reason was theological, with the devil being Satan, personifying evil and opposition to God. Along with many others, I believe that Liszt's B Minor Sonata may have a hidden theological program. Some believe it could be based on Milton's" Paradise Lost," or if not specifically Milton, at least the Fall of Man. This connection, of course, has never been proven. Other commentators have believed that Goethe's "Faust" was the inspiration for this work. In either of these interpretations, the performer and listener can imagine the spirit of Satan or Mephistopheles in this work, arguably Liszt's greatest piece for solo piano. I urge everyone to get to know Liszt's Sonata in B Minor if you do not know it already.

Liszt's music so often seems to portray a conflict between the spirit and the flesh, between heaven and earth, between good and evil, or between the affirmative and the doubting or negative. He saw music as being "the art at once both satanic and divine."

His two major orchestral works, in addition to his 13 symphonic poems, are the Faust Symphony and the Dante Symphony. In Goethe's Faust, Mephistopheles states "I am the spirit that negates."

Therefore in his Faust Symphony, Liszt cleverly does not provide Mephistopheles with a theme of his own, instead having the music representing Mephistopheles twist, distort and corrupt the other themes in the work. The quality of the negative is perceivably present throughout Liszt's works, even when not specifically representative of Mephistopheles or Satan.

Liszt also had a fascination with death and the damned throughout his life. In his early 20s he visited prisons to view the condemned before their executions. When there was a rampant cholera epidemic raging in Paris when he was 21, Liszt was known to keep his neighbors awake all night by improvising variations on the Dies Irae chant, from the Requiem Mass, which describes the Last Judgment. Many of Liszt's compositions clearly deal with death, most obviously his work for piano and orchestra entitled "Totentanz," Dance of Death.

Liszt often depicted dramatic struggle in a very theatrical manner. In anything theatrical there is a thin line between sublimity and kitschiness. It is an especially thin line in Liszt's music since he was a highly emotional person, and he was composing in the era of full- blown Romanticism. The Roman Catholic painting in his time, called St. Sulpice art, which he surrounded himself with, has been viewed by many as quite saccharine. The popularity of Gothic novels was another symptom of the theatricality which was in the air in those times.

Petrarch Sonnet No.104

Human love is frequently a subject of Liszt's compositions. He was always a person of contradictions and inner conflict. Let us now listen to one of Liszt's compositions which deals with the potential conflicting emotions of love.

The great 14th-century scholar and humanist Francesco Petrarca has been credited with preparing the way for the Renaissance. With his 207 sonnets, among the earliest and most important examples of sonnets, he set the tone for all future Italian lyric poetry. He intensely and dramatically explored the various emotions of love, especially employing the most musical sounding Italian words. Revealing his own internal conflicts was a common thread in Petrarch's poetry as Sonnet 104 clearly evidences. Liszt originally set this sonnet as a song when he was living in Italy with Marie. Then later in life, he made a piano transcription, then revised the song, and then revised the piano transcription, placing it in the second book of his pieces entitled" Years of Pilgrimage." This is the version I will play. One can clearly hear the influence of Italian opera in this piece. The English translation of the sonnet appears in your program.

For pieces depicting both human and spiritual love Liszt would frequently employ the key of E Major which he employs in this piece. A large amount of his music involves spiritual aspiration and F-sharp Major was his favorite key to represent heaven.

PERFORM: Petrarch Sonnet No. 104

The Man Liszt

An image has been handed down through many generations that Liszt was a selfish, superficial playboy who pandered to his audiences by writing glitzy showpieces and playing them in a manner that assaulted the piano. It is true that he did receive rock star treatment when he toured all of Europe in his 20's and 30's. But that widely disseminated image is a gross exaggeration of only one of the many chapters in his life, and it distracts from who he really was and the comprehensiveness of all he achieved in his long life. I believe that Franz Liszt is the most misunderstood composer in history. Contrary to the false image, Liszt was among the sincerest and most selfless of composers, as well as among the most interesting.

The number one, dominant, aspect of the man Liszt was his sincere, intense religious devotion, from early childhood consistently until his death. For him, this devotion transcended everything else - including music. Late in life he wrote that "the exaltation of the Cross, this was ever my true vocation." His parents had named him, not the German, Franz, or the Hungarian, Ferenc, but rather the Latin, Franciscus. From earliest childhood he derived inspiration from the lives of the saints and the concept of dying as a martyr.

His father had been a Franciscan novice at a monastery until the age of 19, and later frequently took his young son to visit the monks and priests who lived near to their home. These were deeply meaningful experiences for the young boy, and he grew up desiring to be a priest himself.

As a young teenager, he already knew every page of "The Imitation of Christ," by Thomas à Kempis. At age 16 in Paris, after much prayer and thought, he consistently verbalized his deep desire to be a priest. His father talked him out of it, reasoning with him that "the path of the true artist does not lead away from religion – it is possible to have one path for both." A year or two later, after his father had died, Liszt went off the deep end, and fell into an intense religious mania which included going to confession every day. He again expressed his deep desire to enter the Paris seminary. Thank goodness he was talked out of it by his local priest. Throughout his life, Liszt attended mass every day, frequently arising well before dawn, and sometimes walking a considerable distance to mass, carrying a lantern for illumination. The famous historian of Rome, Gregorovius, who knew Liszt, described him as "fanatically Catholic."

In 1865, at age 54, Liszt took four minor Franciscan orders of the priesthood – doorkeeper, lector, exorcist, and acolyte. He would thereafter always wear the black ankle- length cassock of the Franciscans. As he wrote: "when the monk is already formed within, why not appropriate the outer garment of one?" Liszt was speaking figuratively. He made clear that he was wearing the cassock, worn by anyone who had a clerical role, but that he did not desire to ever wear the frock of a monk. There has been much confusion about whether Liszt was a priest. He was NOT a priest. He could not celebrate mass, he could not hear confession, and he took no vows of chastity. However, he was entitled to be called "Abbe," a title of the lower ranking clergy in the Catholic church.

A second fundamental trait of Liszt was his selflessness. He lived for others. "Caritas" (charity) was his motto, as it was also the motto of his own patron saint, St. Francis of Paola. In his later life, he

wrote over 2,000 letters every year, many of them for the purpose of assisting and pulling strings for other musicians. He accepted the envious hostility which the world heaped on him because he was a celebrity, and just let it roll off. Hating confrontation and wanting to always take the high road, he did not fight back.

A third fundamental trait of Liszt was his idealism. He wanted to change and uplift society. His principal goal throughout his life was bettering the lives of others.

A fourth attribute was that Liszt was a person who sought the meaning of life through every vehicle possible. He voraciously read all that he could of the greatest world literature. He wanted to experience all aspects of life firsthand, which motivated him to visit hospitals and insane asylums. His attitude was exemplified by the inscription he wrote, at age 25, in a hotel registry: "Coming from: Doubt. Going to: Truth. Place of birth: Parnassus. Occupation: Musician – philosopher."

Another dominant characteristic of Liszt was his zealousness and eagerness. The famous philosopher and spiritual teacher Lamennais said of the 22- year -old Liszt: "I can't remember ever having met a more sincere enthusiasm." Liszt was not aggressive, arrogant, or pushy, and he was always extremely polite to everyone. However, his vibrant enthusiasm ended up putting off many people since he would, as the saying goes, "suck a lot of the air out of a room" when he entered. Chopin was always very uncomfortable around Liszt, despite Liszt's sincere, deep affection for Chopin. Clara Schumann wrote: "I can't be around Liszt very long; this restlessness, this instability, so much animation. It is all very exhausting." Berlioz recalled how Liszt "literally dragged me off to have dinner at his house and overwhelmed me with the vigor of his enthusiasm." It must have taken a lot to overwhelm Berlioz, one of the strongest personalities in the history of music!

Liszt gave all of himself to everything he did because he was so sincere and highly motivated to change the world. The problem was that he simply came on too strongly for many people, and many of his musical colleagues were very touchy, hypersensitive people Liszt's playing reflected his giving his all to everything he undertook. When he was a child of seven, he was taken to Vienna to play for his future teacher, Czerny. Czerny documented the occasion and noted that the child while playing, "swayed about on the stool as if drunk, so that I often thought he would fall to the floor." Liszt continued, as an adult, to be intensely emotionally absorbed when playing the piano. This was a principal component in his magnetic, mesmerizing presence at the keyboard, and contributed to the overwhelming impression he made on his listeners. With his head back, and his eyes rarely looking down at the keys, he always looked inspired and cast a magical spell. He became so at one with the piano that some people called him a "piano – centaur," after the half-man, half-beast of mythology. In contrast to the reserved, rather unemotional playing of other virtuosos, Liszt was known for reproducing "all the passions at the keyboard – terror, fright, horror, despair and love."

A pivotal influence on Liszt had been hearing the violinist Paganini perform. No one who heard Paganini failed to be totally overwhelmed. In the case of Liszt, hearing Paganini perform literally altered the course of his life. He had not at that time, aged 20, become the pianist he would become. Hearing and seeing Paganini in person showed Liszt how an instrumentalist could possess an audience by

becoming one with an instrument, and Paganini's total mastery of his instrument unleashed in Liszt an intense exploration of the principles on which a similar mastery of the piano might be obtained. Paganini seemed to epitomize the devil himself onstage with his gaunt and macabre look, and Liszt cultivated some of that diabolical presence in his own performance. It is interesting that even admiring observers detected that Liszt's mouth turned up at the corners, which gave him "a most crafty and Mephistophelean expression when he smiles."

Many in the conservative musical establishment were turned off. What they did not understand was that Liszt was not putting on an act. He simply became one with the piano and his keyboard presence reflected the larger-than-life person of nobility and grandeur which he genuinely was. His uninhibited style of communicating was also exactly what was needed to reach the masses who had never experienced a piano concert before. He was consciously sending a message that an artist was not a meek servant, ushered in to provide entertainment for the aristocracy, as musicians had been for centuries. An artist now was going to be someone who was a leader in society, someone to be looked up to and admired.

If Liszt glamorized the role of the artist it was motivated by the fact that a piano recital performed by a single person, who toured the world, and was heard by the general public who paid an admission, was an entirely new concept. This had never occurred before the 1830's. The theatricality which Liszt cultivated onstage helped to ensure the success of this new experiment. Sure, he tossed off some showpieces at the end of his concerts to wow his audiences and make them want to return in the future. But this was after making them sit through truly great music which he believed that they needed to hear.

Even off the stage, Liszt's presence was unique, charismatic, and riveting. Until his last few years when congestive heart failure caused edema, he was extremely thin, which made him appear taller than his actual medium height. His long, light- brown hair added to an impression of height, as well as contributing to a perceived exoticism. In his earlier years, his thin face was usually pale, and his eyes, which some saw as sea -green but were actually gray, were captivating. When young, his expression seemed to express sadness and suffering, and he was described as seeming to "glide across the room in a distraught way, like a phantom." As he aged, people increasingly noted the benevolence and tenderness in his face.

I believe that in many ways there are parallels between Liszt and Leonard Bernstein. Both, above all, deserved the appellation of Maestro. They were teachers in the truest, most comprehensive sense of the word. They were communicators. They were missionaries of music who brought music to the masses who knew little or nothing about music. They knew how to relate to the common man and could drive listeners into wild frenzies of enthusiasm. Yet they could also inspire and educate their professional colleagues with their truly brilliant and profound insights.

Both men had many contradictory, complex aspects in their personalities. Liszt joked that he was "half Gypsy, half Franciscan," and there was much truth to this. Both Liszt and Bernstein lived life fully and with an intensity and activity that astounded and wore out anyone near them. They both loved

being highly visible in the world, and yet very much craved solitude to compose. Both men wanted to be perceived primarily as composers, and yet the musical world tended to often view them primarily as theatrical, extroverted performers who exhibited obvious histrionics. Both men were greatly misunderstood. Part of this was due to professional jealousy. But much of it was that they had strong personalities and were never really accepted by the conservative, musical establishment of their day

Despite the benevolence in so much of Liszt's personality and actions, he was certainly aware of the diabolical in himself and in human nature. He was not a saint, although some of you may think I am trying to make him one. He was very aware of his human failings, which is why he was always aspiring to overcome them.

Fact vs. Fiction

You may be wondering how the false image of Liszt originated and was perpetuated. Much of this stems from the fact that Marie d'Agoult, Liszt's partner for 10 years, and the mother of Liszt's three children, became a writer. She was following the path of her friend, Aurore Dupin, Chopin's partner, whose pen name was George Sand. Marie viciously savaged Liszt in one of her novels by creating a character whom she knew the world would see as Liszt and assigned all kinds of fictitious actions to the character.

Marie was an emotional basket case all her life. She had been treated for mental illness shortly before Liszt met her, and she always feared going mad. She did end up in an asylum by her early 60s. She always knew she was difficult, and even described herself as "six inches of snow covering 20 feet of lava." Scholars wonder how Liszt had the patience to put up with her for over ten years.

It was bad enough that Marie's novel was read by all of Europe. What really hurt Liszt's reputation was a subsequent book in 1934 by the English music critic, Ernest Newman, entitled "The Man Liszt: A Study of a Tragi- Comedy of a Soul Divided Against Itself." Newman ruined his otherwise fine reputation in creating a real whopper with this work. His so-called "research" consisted primarily of repeating the fictitious nonsense that Marie had written as well as fictitious inventions created by other women. It seems Liszt, being famous, attracted the attention of mentally ill, or at least highly unstable, women who spread false tales. Caveat emptor when you read books and articles about Liszt.

A statement by Liszt's father, on his deathbed, is relevant here. He said that he was worried about his son regarding women. This was very early on taken out of context to imply that Liszt would spend his life unable to resist women physically. The full original statement clearly shows that the father feared since his 15-year-old son was so goodhearted, sympathetic, and sensitive to other people, that later in life he would get taken advantage of and dominated by women. The father ended up being very prescient.

Contrary to the image of Liszt being a promiscuous Don Juan, the two principal women in his life to whom Liszt was drawn to and devoted to, were highly intellectual women. The inception and foundation of Liszt's and Marie's relationship had been their discussions of philosophy, literature, and religion. Princess Carolyne, who was never considered beautiful, was a well-read historian and author.

Knowledgeable in theology, politics, history, and philosophy, she eventually published over 45 prose volumes. An expert in canon law, her magnum opus was her 24 volume “Interior Causes and Exterior Weaknesses of the Church.”

Liszt highly respected these women, and other women with whom he socialized during his life were all highly educated and very intelligent. At least most of those relationships were purely platonic.

If you think I “doth protest too much,” as the line from Hamlet reads, regarding the treatment of Liszt through the years, I refer you to the 1,700 page, three-volume series entitled, “Franz Liszt” by Alan Walker. This is the definitive, and very sorely needed, biography of the composer. Dr. Walker has single-handedly uncovered much about Liszt’s life. His work is a totally unbiased account of Liszt’s life, telling it as it was, “warts and all” as Cromwell is supposed to have said. By the way, mentioning warts is not inappropriate since, as some of you know, Liszt in later life had many large warts grow on his face.

Dr. Walker’s books on Liszt, as well as all his other engaging books, including a biography of Chopin which was published only recently, belong on every music lover’s shelf. I can honestly say that of all the many books I have read on music over the past 55 years, no books gave me more pleasure to read than Dr. Walker’s Liszt volumes. I would also like you know that while much of what I am saying today is my own opinion and observation, my accounts of Liszt’s life are very much derived from Walker’s three volumes. There are over 10,000 books on Liszt, and I have read many more than just Walker’s. However, in addition to being extremely comprehensive, Walker’s volumes are among those few which can be fully trusted.

I certainly do not blame the general public for believing the false image of Liszt. They have been fed it by writers who relish pooh-poohing Liszt and his music, or who ignorantly repeat the fictitious exaggerations. Pianists, who in their talking about Liszt repeat the old tales and trivialize the man and his music also bear some of the responsibility, and their doing so makes me angry. Another culprit are superficial piano performances which primarily emphasize the showy aspects of Liszt’s music.

Transcription of Schumann’s Widmung

Liszt composed over 200 solo piano transcriptions of operatic arias, opera scenes and orchestral music. Some of these transcend the term “transcription,” and have been referred to as “paraphrases.” Some are among the most technically difficult pieces in the piano literature. He also composed well over 100 transcriptions of songs of Schubert, Schumann, and others.

Before our break, I would like to play one of Liszt’s song transcriptions. The original Lied, the German word for “song,” was by Robert Schumann. The poem was written by Friedrich Rückert, and the music was written by Schumann as a wedding present for his wife, Clara. The title, ”Widmung,” translates as “Dedication.” The English translation appears in your program.

A-flat Major was a favorite key of Liszt’s for portraying human love, and it is the key he selected for this work. Liszt’s very famous piano work, “Liebestraum,“ which is a transcription of one of his own songs, is another work dealing with love, and is also in A-flat .

PERFORM: Transcription of Schumann's Widmung

10 MINUTE BREAK

Playing Liszt's Music

The difficulty in playing Liszt's music is not simply the huge abundance of notes usually found on the printed page. Thousands of pianists in the world today can rattle them off with obvious ease. The great challenge is playing them beautifully and intelligibly. The music can sound tawdry when performed in an overtly showy manner, being played too fast, or being played percussively. Liszt himself frequently expressed his opposition to playing his music, as well as other music, too fast. It is significant that he was noted for conducting Beethoven's symphonies at a slower tempo than other conductors. Many times, he expressed his belief that virtuosity should be a means, and not an end.

A surprisingly large number of music lovers do not like Liszt's music, and I am convinced that that usually is because of so many of the performances of Liszt's music. Please remember that if you think you do not like Liszt's, or indeed any composer's music, the reason may lie with the performer. Many pianists do not approach Liszt's music as great art and do not play it with the dignity, respect, and beauty which it deserves. When they regard it as primarily showy music and make it a vehicle to show off their pianistic dexterity, they insult the music and its creator. This applies even to pieces which Liszt wrote to obviously garner audience approval.

Liszt's role model was Beethoven, and from age four throughout his youth, he looked daily at a picture of Beethoven and said that he wanted to be like Beethoven. Liszt believed it was his mission and role to promote Beethoven's piano works by playing them in public, which had only rarely been done. (We noted in our Beethoven presentation that in Beethoven's lifetime there were only two public performances of any of his piano sonatas, and one of those occurred in Boston, Massachusetts.) Liszt even arranged all the Beethoven symphonies for solo piano, so that he could further promote Beethoven's music. We often forget that when Liszt commenced his transcontinental concert tours, Beethoven had only been dead for 12 years, and Beethoven's music was still widely regarded as forbidding and strange.

It was Beethoven's aesthetics of seriousness and nobility which primarily drew Liszt to Beethoven's music. Heroism is an abundant and fundamental quality in Beethoven's music and Liszt takes heroism to an even more obvious level, making the performer the visible protagonist. There should always be a heroic nobility in the performance of Liszt's music as well as Beethoven's.

Liszt viewed the piano as an orchestra. This was a new concept and was the antithesis of Chopin's approach to the piano. A large sonority is at times required to convey the drama of Liszt's music and Liszt said that he was willing to occasionally sacrifice beautiful tone a bit, in comparison with some other pianists whose playing he found to be too precious. He said that if he had wanted to always play with "velvet paws" he could have.

However, this fact is not an excuse to beat up on the piano as so many pianists continually do when they perform Liszt's music. Yes, some strings broke on the pianos Liszt played. However, he was sometimes playing spindly pianos most of which did not have an iron frame as pianos always do today. Strings broke very easily and frequently in those days. Many people who heard Liszt play, and then later heard pianists percussively clobber Liszt's music, steadfastly insisted that Liszt had never been a "piano smasher." It is crucial that a pianist always try and avoid unnecessary angularity and harshness in Liszt's music. This is not easy to do, and I certainly have not always achieved it.

In addition to a large, rich sound, a pianist needs subtle control to play Liszt. Liszt absorbed the elegance and delicacy he had heard in Chopin's playing and made it a part of his own performance and compositions. Liszt and Chopin pioneered Impressionism in piano music, and much lightness and infinite coloration are prerequisites when one plays Liszt's music. If one does not play Chopin exquisitely, one probably won't play Liszt beautifully.

To play Liszt's music successfully, a pianist must have the capacity to exploit the extremes of the piano's dynamic range, since Liszt's music demands the entire range of dynamics – from massive grandeur to the utmost intimacy.

However, even in its noblest moments, Liszt's music is not meant to be performed in a stodgy manner. His music pulsates with life and vitality, and it demands an immediacy and spontaneity in performance. Liszt was a Hungarian, and he loved the gypsies and their music. He visited their camps and watched them for hours, not departing until it became absolutely necessary. They were his musical role models. In his time the Germans perceived two categories of musicians. One was termed a "Musikant" and one was called a "Musiker". The Musikant was the academically trained musician from a conservatory. The Musiker was the instinctive, spontaneous, improvisatory musician with abundant raw, but untrained, musicianship. Liszt admonished all pianists to let their playing show more of the attitude and freedom of the Musiker.

Liszt's music is frequently about love in all its manifestations – human and divine. One must play "con amore," to play Liszt. If one is not seeking to reflect the spiritual in much of Liszt's music it can sound banal and empty. I find it significant that two of the pianists who most understand Liszt's music are Stephen Hough and Paul Barnes. The former joined the Catholic church at age 19 and has twice considered joining the Franciscan order. The latter, in addition to being an outstanding pianist, is an expert on ancient chant, and serves as head chanter at a Greek Orthodox Church in Lincoln, Nebraska. These two pianists clearly get what is" behind the notes" in much of Liszt's music. Two well-known pianists of the 20th century who also very much understood and wrote about what lies behind Liszt's music are Claudio Arrau and Alfred Brendel.

One needs a lot of heart to perform Liszt. But one also needs a head. A paradoxical conclusion of mine regarding musical interpretation is that much overtly romantic 19th-century music needs a very analytical interpreter to organize the disparate elements into a coherent musical structure, while conversely, 18th century classical music, to me, is most successful and communicative when a performer adopts a sufficiently free and expansive approach to allow the music to sing and to breathe. Liszt's

music is frequently very sectional, containing many places where the music pauses or evaporates into silence. It is crucial that an interpreter find a way to hold together and unify every Liszt piece.

Liszt's music contains big gestures and waves of sound. The player must sense and experiment with where to push ahead and where to pull back. Liszt stated that "I don't play according to measure. One must kindle it, or slow it down, according to its meaning." He also conducted in a manner where he used wave- like motions of his hands and arms, rather than delineating each beat.

It is very important that a player be very aware of and sensitive to harmonic direction and arrival points. Communicating the varying degrees of harmonic tension is a significant part of what interpretation consists of in Liszt's music, and, indeed, in the interpretation of all music.

An all too little used approach when arriving at climactic points in Liszt's music is the use of allargando—a simultaneous increase in volume and a slowing. It is known that Beethoven often employed this in his playing, and it is certain that Liszt frequently did also.

The success of Liszt's music is highly dependent on the interpreter – more so, I believe, than perhaps any other composer's music. The performer needs to feel a deep commitment to every note of Liszt's pieces which he/she performs. If the listener cannot sense a truly sincere identification with the music on the part of the player, the performance will not be successful.

The performer must make Liszt's music his/her own and allow the performance to become a truly personal statement. Liszt music is like a loosely written script which an actor must take, and run with, and bring to life. The analogy with acting is not inappropriate. A great actor does not act a part – he or she becomes the character. Liszt's music is partly theater, and the performer must have an actor's sense of timing and innate theatrical instincts. Liszt himself said that that it was his mission to "unite in colossal proportions the theater and the church."

Possibly the single most difficult aspect of performing Liszt's music is that when communicating the emotions in the music, one must not lose control from excessive emotional involvement.

It is not easy for a performer to hear what is actually coming out of a piano when inwardly feeling highly emotional music. The thick textured music of Liszt needs to have the balances and clarity preserved. The music of Liszt can turn into a horrible muddle of sound if the performer is not careful. However, enthused the pianist may be, astute listeners do not respond well to being assaulted by overdone and incomprehensible waves of thick sound. Control and proportion are very necessary and often overlooked qualities when performing Liszt's music. The pianist should allow the music to sing at all times.

It is not sufficient for a pianist to only be familiar with the keyboard works of any composer. Liszt's 13 symphonic poems, a genre he established, his 70+ songs, and his church music can shed valuable illumination on his piano music. Liszt's and Wagner's music have much in common, since Liszt's music very much influenced Wagner's, as Wagner himself acknowledged. Every pianist playing Liszt would benefit from listening to the performances of the Wagner operas with James Levine conducting,

since Levine's sublime interpretations provide the pianist a model for the interpretation of Liszt's piano music. The music always breathes, and the sound is sumptuous and never harsh. The interpretive concepts are spacious without squareness. They are filled with the warmth and love which envelop every one of this truly great conductor's performances.

I would like to pay tribute to the great Danish-American pianist, Gunnar Johansen, who in the 1970's recorded virtually all of Liszt's solo piano compositions, playing them with understanding, fearlessness and tenderness. Associated with the University of Wisconsin for 40 years, he was the first artist-in-residence at an American university. Johansen was also a remarkable human being in ways which transcended his pianism. It was a privilege to have met him and heard him during my years at the University of Wisconsin.

A truly extraordinary interpreter of Liszt was Howard Karp, whose profound and deeply felt approach to all music allowed him to produce Liszt performances which to me are unexcelled. One hears in them a grand spaciousness without pompousness, enormous depth of thought , infinite tenderness, as well as ultimate virtuosity. Every note has meaning and character, and I know of no finer example of Liszt playing for people to emulate. It was the world's loss, but his students' gain, that his career was spent primarily in teaching, and I was fortunate to be his student at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. As I wrote upon learning of his passing in 2014, "True nobility and genuine love expressed in sublime musicianship and pianism, and in the example of a beautifully lived life." Howard Karp.pdf (dersnah-fee.com) and Howard Karp, pianist and musical patriarch, dies at 84 (wisc.edu)

There exist two CD collections, comprising a total of 8 CD's, of his live performances. His playing illustrates the fact that much of the finest musicmaking in the world does not necessarily come from the heavily marketed and promoted musicians who race from city to city playing concerts. As Anthony Tommasini of the New York Times wrote in 1998 in an article entitled "Master Teachers Whose Artistry Glows in Private:" "There are many master teachers who are revered by young musicians as performers yet who seldom stray from the environs of a conservatory or college campus. . . . Some of these teachers, though renowned within musical circles, have low profiles among the larger concertgoing public. . . . To them, passing on the practice to younger musicians is a sacred and self-empowering trust." It is interesting that the first artist he cited was Howard Karp, whom he described as "an elegant musician, a Romantic by nature whose performances are spacious, imaginative and technically exquisite."

Several years ago, they year of Liszt's 200th birthday, I wrote an essay which includes many more details on the playing of Liszt's piano music as well as specifics of how Liszt performed himself. It is worth reading and can be found on my website, www.dersnah-fee.com/essays-educational-materials.html

Liszt's Later Years

When Liszt went to Rome in 1861 at the age of 50, he was expecting to marry Princess Carolyne, who had lived with him for 14 years. She had been married at the age of 17, and it had been an arranged marriage. Her marriage had been annulled by the Russian civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and she and Liszt were expecting that the marriage would be annulled by the Roman Catholic Church. After many years of effort to achieve the annulment, the path appeared clear for them to marry. Suddenly, the day

before the planned wedding at San Carlo al Corso in Rome on Liszt's 50th birthday, the Vatican rescinded the annulment. The machinations behind this reversal were first uncovered and thoroughly elucidated by Dr. Walker. While fascinating, they are too complex to go into today.

Carolyne would remain in Rome for the rest of her life, residing apart from Liszt, in semi-seclusion, and writing her voluminous books. In part, they espouse the same beliefs which Lamennais had advocated several decades earlier, and which I will discuss later today. Though the romantic aspects of Liszt's and Carolyne's relationship had ended, she remained a devoted, as well as very outspoken, opinionated counselor and advisor to Liszt for the rest of their lives.

Not being able to marry the person to whom he felt closest in his whole life added another disappointment to a long line of disappointments for Liszt. 17 years previously, Marie, with bitter hostility, had left him and attempted to destroy him. Of his three children, only one was still alive, and she at times refused to communicate with him. His son had died at the age of 20 of consumption, and his older daughter had died at the age of 27 of septicemia after childbirth. Much of the music world caricatured him as a performer, and never gave him credibility as a composer. The Roman Catholic musical establishment in Rome didn't really want what he had to give. Some of those in Rome even scoffed at his having entered four orders of the priesthood, and when they saw him, would derisively say: "There goes Mephistopheles dressed as an Abbé."

Many people seemed unable to accept that human beings can have contrasting characteristics in their makeup and still be totally sincere. Liszt's curse was having so many different sides to his personality, and the fact that any famous person with a strong personality can provide an easy target.

By his 50s, with his long hair now very white, Liszt was burned out in many ways. "Sometimes sadness envelopes my soul like a shroud," he wrote. At only age 66, and still in good physical health, he stated "I am extremely tired of living." There is no doubt that he was frequently seriously depressed, and he acknowledged more than once that only his devout Catholicism prohibited him from taking his own life. Introspection and resignation now dominated his life, and it is known that his consumption of cognac, which he had savored all his life, greatly increased during these years. He also started to regularly drink the dangerous absinthe. For Liszt personally, there was nothing left in life. However, he continued to live for others as had always been his philosophy. He soldiered onwards as the selfless Franciscan that he aspired to be and was.

Liszt's Late Piano Music

Most of Liszt's late music reflects his state of mind in his last decades. "I carry a deep sadness of heart which must now and then break out in sound." I suppose this largely introspective music could be viewed by some people as reflecting a normal aging process. But it is far, far more intense than that. It evidences a deep disillusionment and true suffering. Much of it became increasingly bleak and bitter the closer to the end of his life it was composed. Virtually none of it was ever intended to be performed for people, and Liszt said that some of these pieces should never be played for anyone or published. Many never were published until the 1970's.

Princess Carolyne said that Liszt was “hurling his lance into the boundless realms of the future” and that a century later these works would be comprehended. “Ich kann warten,” I can wait, Liszt himself said. She was right. By the 1970s and 80s many pianists had discovered and had come to appreciate these unique works. However, there was one pianist and composer who knew and valued some of these works not long after they were written--Béla Bartók. Knowing these pieces resulted in Bartok calling Liszt, the “true father of modern music.”

Wagner referred to these later, uncompromising works of Liszt as “budding insanities.” Many are highly experimental works, with some being more radical than what Debussy would ever write. The theatrical, emotional rhetoric of Liszt’s earlier music is gone. Many of these pieces contain very few notes and some seem to almost consist of more silence than notes.

Music having a tonal center is what had always formed the basis for all Western European music, and this was referred to as tonality. Liszt had always been fascinated with expanding tonality, by making the tonal center more obscure. In these late works, Liszt stretched tonality to its limits. He even wrote a piece which he entitled “Bagatelle Without Tonality.” Many of these late pieces seem very vague, with the endings floating off into an ethereal dreamworld or into a mood of utter despair and gloom. However, they are not all dark and gloomy, and moments of tender, accessible simplicity do occur. The subject matter and titles of nearly all these late Liszt works concern four subjects: retrospection; Hungary; death; and Catholicism. Let us now listen to some of these extraordinary, thought-provoking works, which are still largely unknown to most music lovers and many professional musicians.

Those who doubted Liszt’s devotion to Hungary have made much of the fact that Liszt never was able to speak much Hungarian. However very few Hungarians of Liszt’s time spoke any Hungarian, since Hungary did not have any autonomy until 1867, with the Austrians having forced their will and the German language on the Hungarian people. The fact that today only about one in a thousand residents of Hawaii speak the Hawaiian language does not prevent residents from being proud Hawaiians.

When Liszt returned to perform extensively in Hungary in 1840, he found himself to be considered a national hero, and was viewed as perhaps the most famous Hungarian in Europe. It was at this point that his sense of identification with Hungary intensified and never lessened. He proudly stated, “I remain from my birth to the grave Magyar in heart and mind.”

Five Hungarian Folk Songs and Csárdás obstiné

We will now hear Liszt’s Five Hungarian Folk Songs and the Csardas obstiné. The Hungarian Folk Songs Liszt arranged here are a different breed from the Hungarian Rhapsodies which he had composed earlier in his life. Those were written to be showpieces capturing the Gypsy style of flamboyant, improvised music-making. This set of five folk songs foreshadows what Bartok would do a generation and a half later--harmonize authentic Hungarian folk songs, which are not synonymous with Gypsy music. The second, third and fifth are love songs, with the fifth describing a turtledove crying for its mate.

A csárdas is a traditional Hungarian dance which builds to a wild finish. The Csárdás obstiné contains more of the Gypsy influence than do the Five Hungarian Folk Songs. I believe that Liszt would be pleased that I include some of his Hungarian pieces in our program today. I will point out some of the Hungarian features of the music before performing these two pieces, back to back.

Go to Piano:

Point out Hungarian features of these pieces:2/4 meter; narrow-range melodies; common absence of upbeats which reflect the typical Hungarian language accentuation patterns; dotted rhythmic patterns(short-long and long- short); syncopations; pseudo-improvisatory embellishments; employment of Hungarian modes.

PERFORM: Five Hungarian Folk Songs and Csárdás obstiné

La lugubre gondola No. 2

Liszt and Wagner had a very complex personal relationship. It was Liszt who single-handedly basically put Wagner on the map by promoting and conducting his operas. Wagner had been banished from Germany for 13 years for his part in the revolution of 1848, and many conductors shunned his music since it was not politically correct to have anything to do with his music. Over the entire course of their relationship of 40 years, Wagner used Liszt for all he could-monetarily, and for promotional purposes. Musically they fully saw eye to eye and deeply believed in each other. However, personally there were significant differences.

These differences principally centered on religion, with the agnostic Wagner constantly scoffing at Liszt's devout Catholicism, at one time calling Liszt, "the last great victim of this Latin-Roman world." Things came to a head when Liszt's married daughter fell in love with Wagner, and they decided to marry. Not only was Liszt opposed because he knew so very well Wagner's abundant and serious personal deficiencies. The idea of his daughter getting a divorce and marrying in a Lutheran church, which she subsequently did, was totally repugnant to him. There were five years when there was no communication between the Wagners and Liszt. However, a reconciliation eventually occurred and there were many occasions when Liszt spent time with his daughter and Wagner in the last 14 years of Liszt's life.

Of course, the occasions together were always to promote the cause of Wagner's works. But Liszt willingly allowed himself to be used in this way. Liszt had never allowed any disapproval of a musician's personality, behavior, or lifestyle to prohibit his promotion of their music if he believed in their music.

Liszt's death was even hastened by his having undertaken a trip to Bayreuth, the location of the Wagner home and site of the Wagner Festival, when he was already dreadfully ill. His friends had tried to dissuade him from traveling. But they were all told: "My daughter wants it, and I promised her that I would go." Liszt's death in Bayreuth explains why Liszt came to be buried in Bayreuth in the shadow of Wagner, and not in Rome, Paris, Hungary or anywhere else in Europe.

From mid-November of 1882 through mid-January 1883, Liszt stayed with Wagner and his entourage at the Palazzo Vendramin in Venice. Wagner at this point was constantly hacking from his own congestive heart disease. Liszt took frequent walks in Venice and was intrigued by the funeral gondola processions which he observed gliding along the canals. One night he had a premonition that Wagner would soon die and that his body would be transported in a gondola up the Grand Canal. This inspired two compositions, each entitled "La lugubre gondola." Within weeks Wagner did die, and his body was transported up the Grand Canal to the train station to be taken back for burial in Bayreuth. When Liszt, having already left Venice, heard the news, he said: "Today, him, and tomorrow me." It wasn't quite tomorrow. Liszt himself died three and a half years later, at the age of 75. I will introduce aspects of 'La lugubre gondola" from the piano.

Go to Piano: point out aspects of La lugubre gondola

PERFORM: La lugubre gondola No.2

Liszt's Philosophy of Music

Liszt continuously sought transcendence. The dictionary defines transcendence as:" going beyond limits, going beyond the material universe." Liszt believed that the rational mind and the intellect did not provide enough to be the guides to life, and he sought spiritual ecstasy through the mysticism of Roman Catholicism.

Liszt viewed the purpose of music as being to uplift, elevate and transport to a higher world. He fervently believed that music came directly from God, and that music was a bridge from heaven to earth. A significant aspect of Liszt's outlook was that he saw music as a regenerative force for all of society and not just a means for he, himself, to be transported to a higher world.

Liszt believed that the musician, whether composer or performer, had an obligation to society. This conviction in large part derived from the influence of two movements which were very potent in Paris when Liszt was in his early 20's.

The first was Saint-Simonism. This movement originated as an economic socialism which aimed for the equality of all people. It evolved into a socio-religious sect, merging Christianity with socialism. After Saint-Simon had died, the leadership was assumed by a person who turned it into a cult. Gatherings resembled evangelical revivals and communes were founded. After having engendered much controversy, eventually the movement faded away. But at its height, Heine, Berlioz, George Sand, and other intellectuals were very involved.

Liszt never officially became a member. But he was frequently seen enthusiastically playing the piano and improvising at the meetings. The movement had two important lasting effects on Liszt. One, it made him more socially aware, and two, he absorbed deeply the movement's preaching that music had a divine role to play in transforming society. The movement also espoused the belief that the artist was like a priest – a chosen vessel of God to edify the rest of society.

The second major influential movement on Liszt, as well as on Princess Carolyne, was the teaching of Lamennais. Lamennais was a priest who gained much fame, as well as notoriety, for attacking the church for backing the ruling monarchies and not the needs of the common people. He advocated on behalf of the weak and preached sacrificing for the poor. His simple lifestyle, for example dressing like a peasant, and his mesmerizing personality attracted many people who sat at his feet as if he was a guru.

Lamennais held similar beliefs to the Saint-Simonists regarding the arts. He also preached that art is a manifestation of God and that an artist was like a priest ministering to his congregation, with the responsibility and obligation to assume this role. Liszt spent three months in 1834, when he was 23, at the house of Lamennais. Liszt was definitely very influenced by Lamennais' concept of the role of the artist and the artist's place in society. Among the results of Liszt's stay there were two essays, one of which was entitled "On the Position of Artists and their Place in Society." Significantly, the title of the other essay was "On the Future of Church Music."

The time spent in the presence of Lamennais also resulted in Liszt's first piano compositions of any significance. It is interesting that one of these compositions was written to commemorate a workers' rebellion in Lyon, and another was entitled "Poetic and Religious Harmonies

Les jeux d'eaux a la villa d'Este

The first volume of Liszt's collection entitled "Years of Pilgrimage" contained works inspired by his travels and residences in Switzerland with Marie. The second volume was a product of their experiences in Italy a few years later. The third volume contains seven pieces which were all written in Liszt's old age.

While Liszt spent most of his last 25 years in his tiny spartan apartment in Rome, he loved to visit and temporarily reside at the Villa d'Este, 20 miles from Rome. There he could marvel at the hundreds of spectacular fountains as well as the magnificent gardens and the ancient cypresses. A cardinal kept a room available for Liszt's use whenever he wished to stay there. Liszt felt great peace when he daily meditated for hours beside the fountains and cypresses. In the summer of 1877 Liszt was especially despondent and the fountains meant extra much to him. He expressed his feelings engendered by the fountains in one of his most transcendental compositions, "The Fountains at the Villa d'Este." It is obvious that this work is more than simply a depiction of water. At one point in the score he wrote in Latin the verse from John 4:14: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." A large amount of Liszt's music involves spiritual aspiration and F-sharp Major was his favorite key to represent Heaven. "The Fountains at the Villa d'Este" is in F Sharp Major.

PERFORM: The Fountains at the Villa d'Este

Sursum corda

I hope that I have today persuaded you to abandon the ridiculous common image that Liszt was an egotistical, womanizing, superficial showman who wrote only flashy music, and to understand why some of us are incensed when this false image is perpetuated. I have aimed to share some of the real Liszt with you and to explore what lies behind the notes he composed. Many pianists would end our day today with a showy, virtuoso piece. I believe that Liszt would wish me to end our time together today, as we began, with a religious piece. Practicing his religion in all aspects was what Liszt's life was fundamentally about. I believe that he would approve of my choice of the Sursum corda, the culminating piece in his third volume of the" Years of Pilgrimage."

To me the third volume of the "Years of Pilgrimage" sums up Liszt's life and what perhaps every life aspires to. It symbolizes something higher than a worldly pilgrimage through nature, literature, and human love. It represents an inner pilgrimage, a continual struggle of striving to go higher and higher, always seeking more transcendence.

The Sursum corda (Lift Up Our Hearts) occurs in the Mass at the point just prior to the consecration of the Eucharist. I would like to share what one scholar, James M. Baker, has written of Liszt's Sursum corda: "Only through arduous struggle and fearful tribulation can the soul find release…..The melody , like the soul, follows a tortuous route, striving upward yet pushed back again and again, enduring agonizing dissonances….The moment of terror, the tritone, at last arrives, but the soul continues on to the ecstatic transcendence of union with God….The Sursum corda concludes with a cataclysmic affirmation of faith."

I share Liszt's lifelong, deeply held belief in the spiritual power of music to lift up all of society as well as each of our individual hearts. That belief is why I have created this series, to do my small part to share that belief with you, my friends, and neighbors. I thank you for taking your time to be a part. Your attendance shows that you are seeking to be uplifted by music. May you continue to explore the soulful world of classical music, and may it always meet your needs and lift up your hearts. As Liszt himself wrote, "Art is a heaven on earth, to which one never appeals in vain when faced with the oppressions of this world."

PERFORM: Sursum corda