

The Cambridge Companion to Liszt

This *Companion* provides an up-to-date view of the music of Franz Liszt, its contemporary context and performance practice, written by some of the leading specialists in the field of nineteenth-century music studies. Although a core of Liszt's piano music has always maintained a firm hold on the repertoire, his output was so vast, influential and multi-faceted that scholarship too has taken some time to assimilate his achievement. This book offers students and music lovers some of the latest views in an accessible form. Katharine Ellis, Alexander Rehding and James Deaville present the biographical and intellectual aspects of Liszt's legacy; Kenneth Hamilton, James Baker and Anna Celenza give a detailed account of Liszt's piano music, including approaches to performance; Monika Hennemann discusses Liszt's Lieder; and Reeves Shulstad and Dolores Pesce survey his orchestral and choral music.

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LISZT

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Preface

The Cambridge Companion to Liszt presents a survey and contextualisation of his music by some of the leading writers in the field. Few composers have benefited more than Liszt from the upsurge in interest in Romanticism over the last few decades, and the centenary of his death in 1986 gave extra impetus to re-evaluation of his importance. A volume such as this is very different from one that could have been written even twenty years ago. In the first place, a greater quantity of Liszt's music is now in print. The New Liszt Edition (Editio Musica, Budapest) is gradually progressing through what must be one of the most dauntingly large work-lists of any composer, and many formerly overlooked or unpublished pieces are now easily available for study. In the second place, and at least as importantly, much more of Liszt's music is actually being played and heard. If a central core of his achievement – mostly some piano pieces and a handful of symphonic poems – has always been in the standard repertoire, the rest has until recently remained on the periphery. Although it is still true that several masterpieces – the *Gran Mass* and *Psalm XIII* come immediately to mind – deserve much more frequent performance, artists are now including pieces on concert programmes or recordings that have hardly been heard since their creation. One pioneering project that must be mentioned specifically in this context is Leslie Howard's astonishing achievement in committing all of Liszt's piano music to disc (on the Hyperion label), including all significantly different versions and all available extant unpublished works. Owing to the success of this monumental undertaking, even the most obscure transcriptions or historically important 'first attempts', like the early versions of the *Dante Sonata*, need no longer be only references on a page, but can be experienced directly by any interested music-lover, however shaky or non-existent their piano technique. Gradually more of Liszt's output in other genres is also being recorded, and this will no doubt prompt further re-evaluation of his legacy. After all, even Wagner declared that he found it virtually impossible to judge Liszt's symphonic poems from the printed page – he needed to hear them played.

Many late twentieth-century landmarks in Liszt scholarship have also made this *Companion* more timely, accurate and easier to write. Fair mention of all of these would take up several pages, and would certainly include work by Mária Eckhardt and Detlef Altenburg, but only a few more general items can be cited by name here. Alan Walker's magisterial three-volume

study of Liszt's life and work (New York: Knopf, 1983–96) has unearthed much new material and provided a strong stimulus for further research. His other publications, including the recent *The Death of Franz Liszt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), an edition of the diary of Liszt's pupil Lina Schmalhausen, who helped to nurse the composer through his final illness, are also thought-provoking reading for Liszt specialists and enthusiasts. Michael Saffle's essential *Franz Liszt – A Guide to Research* (New York: Garland, 1991, revised edition, 2004) is no doubt on every Liszt scholar's writing-desk, as should be Adrian Williams's splendid *Portrait of Liszt by Himself and His Contemporaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), which gathers together a vast number of judiciously chosen and important primary sources, presented chronologically with extensive annotations. Williams's other collection *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) is scarcely less useful. Finally, Derek Watson's perceptive and concise *Liszt* (London: Dent, 1989) shows that it is possible to condense a vast subject into a single volume without jeopardising either accuracy or an elegant prose style.

The first three chapters of this *Companion* help to place Liszt in the context of his own time and of twentieth-century reception history. A chronology gives a brief run-through of the most important events of his life, but with so much fine biographical writing on the composer already existing (some of it mentioned above) there seems little need for another straightforward re-telling of a well-known saga. The chapters that follow survey the major genres of Liszt's music, and attempt to balance range of reference with depth of discussion, always a problem with a composer like Liszt, who simply wrote so much. To the sacrificial altar have gone some of the organ music (although the most important pieces are touched upon in my chapter 'Piano Music: Early and Weimar Periods'), the small amount of chamber music (much of which consists of arrangements of piano pieces, and the rest of which is simply not very good) and the few melodramas. Liszt's own writings are left to speak for themselves in the quotations that abound throughout this volume. As will be obvious, all the contributors to the *Companion* discuss their allotted areas in their own style and in their own way. I see it as no part of an editor's duty to impose uniformity on a subject teeming with such richness and variety.

Acknowledgements

To save Penny Souster having to read any more of this book, the first sentence is entirely devoted to singing the praises of her legendary patience as a commissioning editor, and to wishing her a long and happy retirement. I should also like to thank the copy-editor, Sue Dickinson, whose deft eye for detail has considerably improved both the layout and the readability of this volume. Music examples have been taken from: New Liszt Edition, Editio Musica Budapest, reproduced with kind permission of the publisher. Copyright permission to reproduce the Plates is gratefully acknowledged as follows: Plate 1.1, Josef Danhauser, *Liszt am Flügel* (1840), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie/F. V. 42, photo: Jürgen Liepe; Plate 7.1 Hans Holbein, *The Equality of Death*, woodcut from *Totentanz*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Plate 7.2, Orcagna, *Trionfo della Morte*, fresco, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Pisa; Plate 7.3, first page of Liszt's 1849 version of *Totentanz*, Piermont Morgan Library, Lehman Collection, New York.

Chronology

- 1811 – Liszt born on 22 October in Raiding, in a largely German-speaking part of Hungary. His father, Adam Liszt, is a superintendent of sheep on the Esterhazy estates, his mother, Maria Anna Lager, is a former chambermaid.
- 1818 – Begins piano lessons with his father, and soon shows signs of prodigious musical talents.
- 1819 – Visits Vienna with his father and plays to Czerny, who agrees to accept him as a pupil.
- 1820 – First concerts in Oedenburg and Pressburg. After the latter a group of Hungarian noblemen offer an allowance to enable him to move to Vienna for lessons with Czerny.
- 1821 – Move to Vienna delayed as his father seeks permission for leave of absence from the Esterhazy estates.
- 1822 – The family arrive in Vienna, where Liszt takes composition lessons from Salieri, in addition to his piano studies with Czerny. His first published composition: a variation on a waltz by Diabelli.
- 1823 – Liszt meets Beethoven. Concerts in Vienna, Pest and several German towns. The family travel to Paris hoping to enrol Liszt in the Conservatoire there, but he is refused admission on the grounds that he is a foreigner.
- 1824 – Studies composition privately with Paer, and makes a successful Paris debut. Begins his association with the Erard family, who organise a tour of England for him, and their pianos.
- 1825 – Tours England for a second time, and gives concerts in southern France. The opera *Don Sanche* – written in collaboration with Paer – is premiered in Paris.
- 1826 – Tours France and Switzerland. Composition lessons with Reicha. *Etude en douze exercices* published.
- 1827 – Death of Liszt's father.
- 1828 – First love, with his piano-pupil Caroline de Saint-Cricq. After the relationship is forcibly ended by her father, Liszt becomes depressed. He abandons public performance, and immerses himself in Romantic literature and the Catholic religion.
- 1829 – Teaches and reads voraciously. Nurtures thoughts of entering priesthood.
- 1830 – The revolution in Paris shakes Liszt out of his melancholy. Meets Berlioz, Lamartine, Hugo and Heine.
- 1831 – Liszt hears Paganini, and is astonished by his mastery of the violin. This spurs him to obsessive study of the technique of his own instrument.
- 1832 – Friendship with Chopin, whose Paris debut is made this year.
- 1833 – Begins relationship with Marie d'Agoult. Transcribes Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* for the piano.

- 1834 – Composes *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, three *Apparitions* and an essay ‘On the Future of Church Music’.
- 1835 – Elopes with Marie d’Agoult to Switzerland, where he takes up a position teaching piano at the Geneva Conservatoire. Their first child, Blandine, is born in December. Writes essay ‘On the Position of Artists’.
- 1836 – Composes several opera fantasias. Returns twice to Paris, where rivalry develops with Thalberg.
- 1837 – Several Paris concerts, including famous ‘duel’ with Thalberg in the salon of Princess Christina Belgiojoso. Composes *12 Grandes Etudes*. Travels with Marie d’Agoult to Italy, where their second child Cosima is born.
- 1838 – Concerts in Vienna, partly in aid of Pest flood victims. Arranges *Etudes d’après Paganini*.
- 1839 – Gives first ‘musical soliloquy’ – a concert entirely without supporting artists – in Rome. Son Daniel born. Beginning of regular tours as a virtuoso. Slow decline of the relationship with d’Agoult.
- 1840 – Presented with Hungarian sword of honour in Pest, where he also makes his debut as a conductor. First meetings with Schumann and Wagner. Tours of Germany and England.
- 1841 – Feverish round of concerts, both in Britain and continental Europe. Composes fantasies on, among other operas, *Don Giovanni*, *Norma* and *Robert le Diable*.
- 1842 – Visits Russia. Given post of honorary Kapellmeister in Weimar, a position that allows him to continue his concert tours.
- 1843 – Debut in Breslau as an opera conductor. First songs published.
- 1844 – Final separation from Marie d’Agoult.
- 1845 – Conducts his First *Beethoven* Cantata at the unveiling of the Beethoven Monument in Bonn.
- 1846 – Tours of France, Germany and Eastern Europe. Increasing disillusionment with his virtuoso career.
- 1847 – Meets Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, and sojourns at her Woronince estate. Soon after his trip to Constantinople, where he plays before the Sultan, Liszt abandons his concert tours to concentrate on composition. He thereafter refuses all offers of fees for public performances.
- 1848 – Settles in Weimar, where he is soon joined by Carolyne. Devotes most of his time to duties as Kapellmeister, and begins to work on what will later become his series of Symphonic Poems.
- 1849 – Conducts *Tannhäuser*, and gives brief shelter to Wagner, who is fleeing Germany after the failure of the Dresden uprising. Completes Italian volume of *Années de Pèlerinage*, and makes sketches for an opera, *Sardanapale*.
- 1850 – Composes the Fantasia and Fugue for Organ on ‘Ad nos, ad salutarem undam’, and conducts premiere of *Lohengrin*.
- 1851 – Completes several orchestral works, including *Mazeppa*, and makes final versions of his two sets of piano studies. Book on Chopin, and some articles, all ghost-written by Carolyne.
- 1852 – Conducts premiere of revised version of Berlioz’s *Benvenuto Cellini*.

- 1853 – Sonata in B Minor, Ballade in B Minor and *Festklänge* completed. Brahms visits Weimar.
- 1854 – Finishes initial version of *Faust* Symphony.
- 1855 – *Gran Mass* and *Psalm XIII* completed. First performance of Piano Concerto in Eb, conducted by Berlioz with Liszt as soloist.
- 1856 – Completes *Dante* Symphony. Premieres of the *Gran Mass* and *Hungaria*.
- 1857 – Premieres of Piano Concerto in A Minor, *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne* (final version), Sonata in B Minor, *Faust* Symphony, *Die Ideale*, *Dante* Symphony, *Héroïde funèbre* and *Hunnenschlacht*.
- 1858 – *Hamlet* completed. Following vociferous opposition to the performance of Cornelius's *Barber of Baghdad* in Weimar, Liszt resigns from his post as Kapellmeister.
- 1859 – Writes, in collaboration with Carolyne, the book *The Gypsies and their Music in Hungary*. Liszt's son Daniel dies at the age of 20.
- 1860 – Carolyne leaves Weimar for Rome, where she will remain for the rest of her life. Two Episodes from Lenau's *Faust* composed. Liszt's first grandchild Daniela von Bülow born.
- 1861 – First Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein festival in Weimar. Liszt's planned marriage to Carolyne in Rome thwarted at the last minute by opposition from the Vatican.
- 1862 – Oratorio *St Elisabeth* finished. Liszt's daughter Blandine dies after complications following the birth of her son, Daniel.
- 1863 – During Liszt's stay at the monastery of the Madonna del Rosario, a visit from the Pope prompts him to think once more about a role in the Catholic church.
- 1864 – Sojourn at the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, which he will subsequently visit repeatedly. Trip to Paris, where he sees his mother for what will be the last time.
- 1865 – Premieres of *Totentanz*, *St Elisabeth* and *Deux Légendes*. Liszt takes minor orders in the Catholic church.
- 1866 – Death of Liszt's mother. Last meeting with Marie d'Agoult.
- 1867 – Premiere of *Hungarian Coronation Mass*. Completion of oratorio *Christus*.
- 1868 – Cosima now openly leaves her husband Hans von Bülow to live with Wagner, causing a breach in relations with Liszt.
- 1869 – Begins his 'vie trifurquée' where he spends parts of the year respectively in Weimar, Rome and Budapest.
- 1870 – Cosima marries Wagner.
- 1871 – Estrangement from Wagner and Cosima continues. Scandal involving Liszt and his pupil Olga Janina.
- 1872 – Rapprochement with the Wagners. Liszt visits Bayreuth.
- 1873 – Premiere of *Christus*.
- 1874 – Completes *The Bells of Strassburg Cathedral*, and begins the oratorio *St Stanislaus*.
- 1875 – Liszt made president of the Budapest Academy of Music.
- 1876 – Premiere of *Hamlet*. Liszt present at first Bayreuth festival.

- 1877 – Completes the third book of *Années de pèlerinage*. Plays Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto* and *Choral Fantasia* at a concert in Vienna marking the fiftieth anniversary of Beethoven's death – the young Busoni is among the audience.
- 1878 – Composes *Via Crucis*.
- 1879 – *Ossa arida* composed, and several transcriptions.
- 1880 – Attends various concerts of his music. Continues work fitfully on *St Stanislaus*.
- 1881 – Premiere of *Second Mephisto Waltz*. A fall down stairs in Weimar precipitates the decline of Liszt's health.
- 1882 – Composes final symphonic poem – *From the Cradle to the Grave*. Attends premiere of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth.
- 1883 – Death of Wagner sends Liszt into increasing despondency.
- 1884 – Premiere of *Salve Polonia*. Attends *Parsifal* performances in Bayreuth.
- 1885 – Debussy visits Liszt in Rome. Various piano pieces composed, including completion of *Hungarian Historical Portraits*.
- 1886 – Liszt received with great enthusiasm on visit to England. Gives last concert in Luxembourg before travelling to Bayreuth, where he hears *Tristan* and *Parsifal*. Dies at Bayreuth on 31 July.