

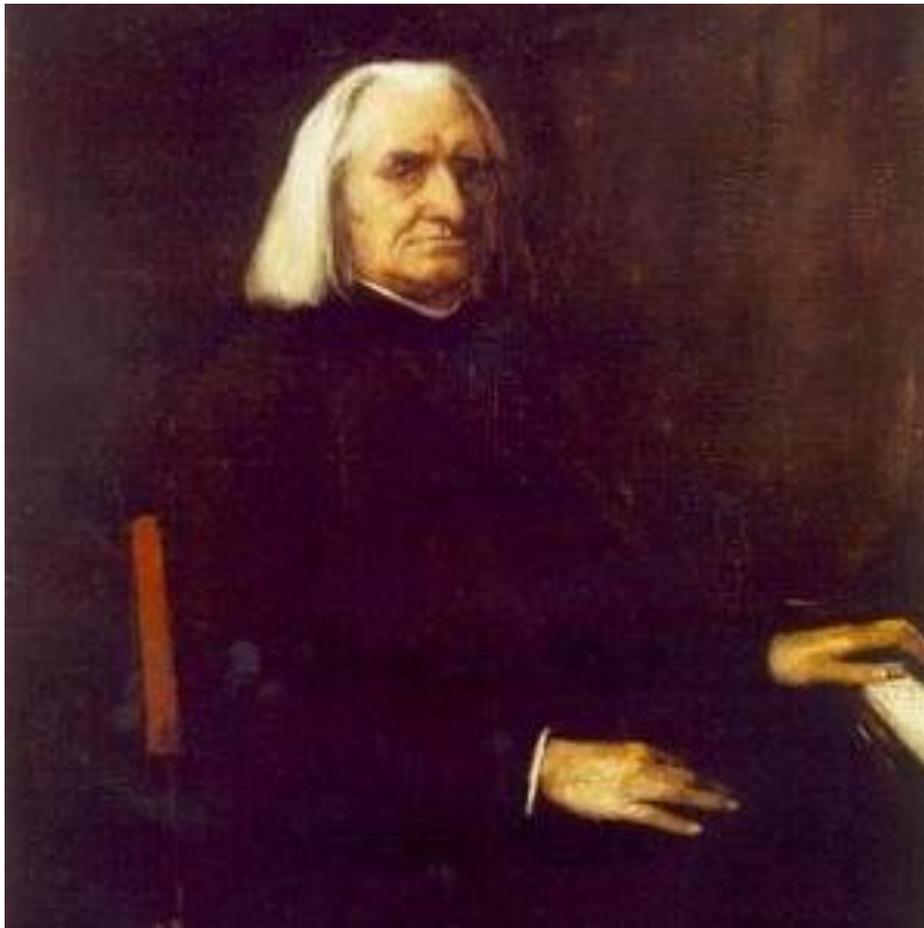


UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE

Benalla & District Inc.



Programme Notes 14th June, 2019

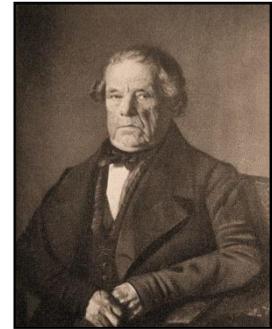


Liszt

When asked why he hadn't written the story of his life, Liszt famously replied, 'because I was too busy living it'.

Of all classical composers, Franz Liszt was the most colourful: an eccentric and heartthrob, a virtuoso pianist, an intellectual, cosmopolitan and globetrotter. And above all, he composed incessantly. His musical oeuvre comprises 123 piano works, 77 lieder, 25 orchestral works, 65 sacred and 28 secular choral pieces, plus numerous arrangements and compositions for organ and other instruments.

Franz Liszt was born on 22nd October 1811 in the town of Raiding in Burgenland, which at that time belonged to Hungarian half of the Austrian empire. At an early age he received piano lessons from his father, an ambitious and strict music teacher. The family moved first to Vienna, where the young Liszt received lessons in composition from Antonio Salieri, and then to Paris. Although the 12-year-old wunderkind was denied admission to the Paris Conservatoire because he was a foreigner, his father had him tutored intensively in composition and theory.



Adam Liszt – father of Franz

Liszt was very interested in the intellectual trends of his time and he formed friendships with numerous celebrated artists in Paris. However, his acquaintance with eminent musical figures of the time, such as Frédéric Chopin, Hector Berlioz and Felix Mendelssohn, made him aware of his own musical limitations. But this knowledge only served to spur him on. In a letter to his pupil and friend Pierre Wolff in May 1832 he writes: "My mind and my fingers are working like the damned. Homer, the Bible, Plato, Locke, Byron, Hugo, Beethoven, Bach, Hummel, Mozart, Weber, are all around me. I study them, meditate on them, devour them furiously. Furthermore, I practise four or five hours a day. If only I don't go mad, you will find in me an artist!"



Marie d'Agoult 1805-76

The following years were characterized by restless travel all across Europe, innumerable compositions and performances. He began a relationship with Marie d'Agoult, six years his senior, with whom he had three children. Stays in Switzerland and Italy were followed by concert tours all over Europe. Artistically, Liszt experienced criticism of his music as well as towering triumphs in this period. In 1841/42 his fame in Berlin as a pianist – in particular among female music lovers – reached the point that Heinrich Heine coined the phrase "Lisztomania" to describe this hysteria.

Liszt and Marie d'Agoult separated at the end of 1843, after Marie refused to continue to overlook Liszt's frequent affairs. A vehement battle over the custody of their children was won by Liszt, who then decided to allow the children to stay with their mother in Paris.



Liszt in 1858

From 1843 to 1861 Franz Liszt was court music director in Weimar and became friends with Richard Wagner, who later – against Liszt’s will – was to marry Liszt’s daughter Cosima. It was also during this period that Liszt began a relationship with the tempestuous princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, who became a strong supporter of his music.

The Weimar years were the most artistically productive of his life. He composed many of his piano works here, as well as the first twelve symphonic poems, numerous secular works (lieder, melodramas, and choral pieces), and sacred music.

Nevertheless, the respect he was accorded as a composer remained modest. This was also true of his activities as a conductor, which received decidedly mixed reviews. He conducted Wagner’s operas no fewer than thirty-six times, in addition to works by Berlioz, Mendelssohn, and Schumann.

After nearly twenty years in Weimar, Franz Liszt moved to Rome, where he hoped to marry. Only a day before the wedding, however, under pressure from her family, Carolyne withdrew her consent to the marriage. This episode had dire consequences for the couple’s relationship and ultimately led to their separation.



Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein.



Abbe Liszt 1865

Subsequently, Liszt devoted himself increasingly to sacred compositions and liturgical works. In 1865 he received minor orders and was made an abbé by Pope Pius IX. In the later years of his life his compositions finally began to receive recognition, especially his orchestral works and his sacred music. In 1886, already gravely ill, he travelled to Weimar to attend the Bayreuth Festival, which was being run by his daughter Cosima. On 31st July 1886 only days after his arrival, he died and was buried at the Bayreuth town cemetery.

Acknowledgement: www.austria.info

Franz Liszt Fantasizing at the piano (1840), (painting oil on wood by Joseph by Danhauser)

The gathering shows ...

seated:

*Alfred de Musset or Alexandre Dumas,
George Sand, Franz Liszt, Marie d'Agoult;*

standing:

*Victor Hugo or Hector Berlioz
Niccolò Paganini, Gioachino Rossini;
a bust of Beethoven on the grand piano,
a portrait of Byron on the wall,
a statue of Joan of Arc on the far left.*



Overture – Opera “Don Sanche” S. 1

As an opera composer, Liszt's career began and ended early. His only completed work in the form, “Don Sanche ou le Château d'Amour”, was first performed at the Paris Opéra on 17 October 1825, days before his 14th birthday. The choice of venue and the media circus that surrounded the premiere suggest an elaborate ploy on the part of Liszt's pushy father, Adam, to market the 13-year-old prodigy as a second Mozart.



The Character –
Don Sanche

Based on a tale by Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian (1755–94), Don Sanche deliberately evokes the late 18th century by lightly parodying ideas of chivalric love that go back as far as the medieval Roman de la Rose. The precincts of the Château d'Amour may be penetrated only by those who love and are loved in return. Don Sanche can't get in, because his beloved Elzire wants nothing to do with him. Enlisting the help of the magician Alidor, he arranges for her kidnap so that he, in his turn, can pose as her rescuer, which produces the required emotional effect. The score – some, or all of it – was orchestrated by Liszt's composition teacher Ferdinando Paër.

The press was out in force on the opening night, and opinion was divided. The *Journal des Débats* described it as ‘cold, humourless, lifeless and quite unoriginal’, though the *Gazette de France* prophesied that ‘nôtre petit Mozart en herbe’ (‘our little budding Mozart’) would go on to achieve great things. Don Sanche was not revived in Liszt's lifetime, however, and little has been heard of it since.

We listen to an abridged version of the Overture (a touch over 3 minutes) played at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam by the European Union Youth Orchestra conducted by Laurent Pillot.

The youtube link, which also contains other excerpts from the opera, sung by Soloists of the European Opera Centre, may be viewed at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCayMU_ScRw

An audio recording of the complete overture can be listened to at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMaBhgVKgwE

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in E flat major S. 124

Liszt began working on the concerto at 19 years of age in 1830. After a series of revisions (about six – it took him 26 years to come up with a publishable version) he premiered the work in 1855 but then went on to make even more changes. Liszt had his revised concerto published in 1856, which is what is performed in concert halls today.

We listen to the first movement which opens with the famous motif to which Liszt is alleged to have privately appended the words: “Das versteht Ihr alle nicht” (‘This none of you understands’).

The opening theme is a catchy phrase led by lower strings and answered by the winds: It is immediately followed by a passage of thundering octaves and a piano cadenza: Contrasting to the powerful main themes, the 2nd theme consists of a serene and beautiful melody, first on clarinet, then alternating between piano, solo violin and the orchestra, then the melody, first introduced by the piano:



The main theme comes back with an even stronger force than the beginning (joined now by the brass), the piano plays a double speed variation of it, and the movement soon quiets down and comes to an end.

The performance we hear is by Argentinian pianist Martha Argarich (at age 76) with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Daniel Barenboim. The youtube link (for the complete concerto) is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7jbPo1aKq0&t=680s

Totentanz S. 126

This work reflects Liszt's fascination with death and the macabre – the title is German for "Dance of Death"! The piece also showcases Liszt's inventive new ideas about how the piano and orchestra are used and combined. It was inspired partly by Traini's fresco, "Triumph of Death," but also from the entire medieval tradition of Death depicted as a wild sort of Peter Pan, leading the folk to their demise in dances of ecstatic frenzy.

Liszt incorporates the Dies Irae melody into Totentanz. The "Dies Irae" (literally "Day of Wrath") is a 13th century Latin hymn once used in Masses for the dead. The text describes the last judgement as understood at the time, perhaps inspired by the Old Testament text of Zephaniah 1:15-16: "That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high bulwarks."

The melody is an ancient Gregorian chant. Liszt's composition features six variations of the Dies Irae melody, each polished and innovative. Balancing the fiery and heavenly, Liszt masterfully controls the orchestra, bringing it into crashing waves of blood-red fury.



The piano part is rough, almost violent in certain sections. For its day this was extremely modern, and bound to have jarred the ears of first-time listeners! Liszt also blends Medieval counterpoint into the score, whilst still maintaining the piece's modern symphonic sound. The recording we hear is from the final concert of the 9th International Franz Liszt Piano Competition Weimar – Bayreuth in 2018.

The pianist is Anton Yaskin, the winner of the competition, accompanied by members of the Staatskapelle Weimar. The youtube link is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-G4pHLeORpg

Les Jeux d'Eau à la Villa d'Este ("Water Games at the Villa d'Este") from S. 163

Liszt's "Années de Pèlerinage" ("Years of Pilgrimage") S.160, S. 161, S. 163 is a musical description of various experiences that the composer had in travelling around Europe. The 26 pieces, written over a 28 year period, are grouped into three "years" published in three volumes (in 1855, 1858, and 1883 respectively) and which extend over his lifetime. Together, they constitute one of the most ambitious and comprehensive projects in nineteenth century piano-music. The first, "year one", is devoted to Switzerland; the second and third "years" are inspired by Italy.



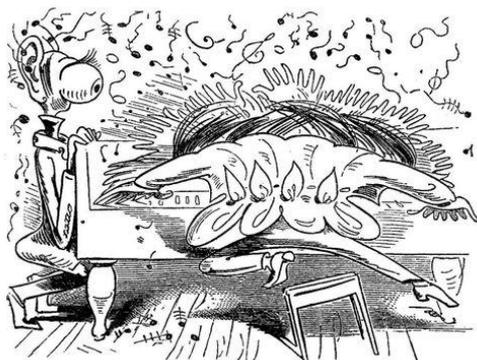
In the 1870s Franz Liszt spent a lot of time at Villa d'Este, the summer residence of his friend Cardinal Hohenlohe. The villa is located in Tivoli, near Rome. The beautiful fountains of the park inspired Liszt to compose *Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* which was completed in 1877 and became part of the third cycle of *Années de Pèlerinage*. This work is the one that music historians consider to be the first impressionist musical piece preceding Debussy and Ravel who composed similar kinds of water music.

Liszt chose the key F sharp major for *Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* providing an innovative, expressive sound (and the structure of the score was quite unusual at the time, too) that displays the ripple of the fountains and water droplets.

The Youtube link is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=loLVnjinGJyU

Piano Sonata in B minor S. 170



"What's new with Liszt's B minor Sonata?"
-one critic's view.

Liszt's sonata (the only one he wrote) is regarded by many as his ultimate masterpiece and it ranks alongside other "greats" in the pantheon of piano repertoire. This was not always the case; in the nineteenth century it was met with extreme reactions, from admiration to suspicion and envy. The critic Eduard Hanslick declared "Anyone who has heard this and finds it beautiful is beyond help", while Wagner heaped praise upon it (perhaps unsurprisingly).

Liszt dedicated the work to Robert Schumann as a reciprocal gesture for Schumann's dedication to him of his (Schumann's) *Fantasie in C major*. Unfortunately Schumann was unable to appreciate or play it as by the time of its composition Schumann had been committed to institutional care. Schumann's wife, Clara, a concert pianist in her own right, made this entry in her diary:

"Liszt sent Robert today a sonata dedicated to him and several other things with a friendly letter to me. But the things are dreadful! [Johannes] Brahms played them for me, but they made me utterly wretched ... This is nothing but sheer racket – not a single healthy idea, everything confused, no longer a clear harmonic sequence to be detected there! And now I still have to thank him – it's really awful".

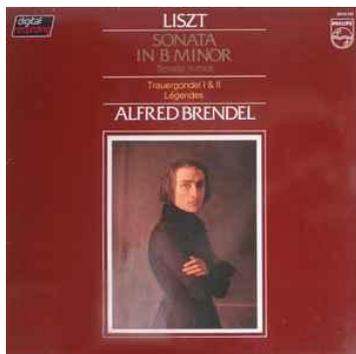
Alfred Brendel, however, has called it “the most original, powerful and intelligent sonata composed after Beethoven and Schubert”.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Liszt's Sonata is that, depending on how we look at the score (and more importantly, listen to the music), it can be convincingly argued that it abides by two completely different structures — and does so simultaneously.

Viewed from one angle, it can be explained as one giant movement in traditional "sonata form", containing the three traditional sections of exposition, development and return (or recapitulation) of the themes.

But looking at it from a different perspective, some listeners can discover the hallmarks of a four-movement composition, albeit played without a break.

The beginning and end are the usual movements of a sonata, which bookend a conventional slow movement and a scherzo — a fast, light movement.



There has been so much written about this work with so little unanimity, that it would be futile to say any more. So let us listen to part of Alfred Brendel's recording of this work.

We start at the beginning where the tempo is marked “Lento assai” (“very slowly”) - It lasts for a bit over a minute. We then pick it where the so-called final section starts.

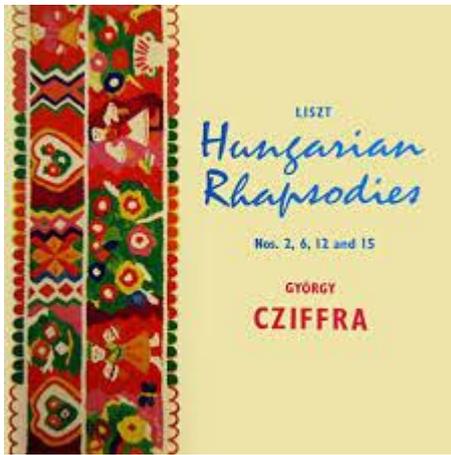
Following the indications on my own CD recording the tempos of this section are (In order): Allegro energico (fast with energy-2'40); Piu mosso (a little more-1'50); Cantando espressivo senza slentare (in singing style without slowing down-1'14); Stretta quasi presto - Presto - Prestissimo (in close succession: Almost very fast-very fast-extremely fast-1'13); Andante sostenuto - Allegro moderato - Lento assai (Sustained walking pace -moderately quickly and bright - Very slowly- 2'53).

The complete Brendel recording is available on youtube at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ju_VXRL6O4w

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6 in D major S 224-6

Hungarian folk music was a source of inspiration for Liszt throughout his life. Liszt was among the first major composers to collect and use folk music in his compositions. He believed all of the melodies he assembled for the Hungarian Rhapsodies were of Gypsy origin, though later research proved their sources were spread across Hungary with Gypsy styles still imbuing the themes.



There are 19 Rhapsodies in all and the 6th is among the more varied and popular of the 19, featuring the pompous and the playful, the exotic and the flashy. Although later arranged for orchestra, in its original piano version, it is famous for its very fast octaves in the last part.

In a sense, this work – good though it is in its catchy, light manner – is precisely the kind of piece that had wrongly tagged Liszt as shallow and virtuosic. It opens with a bold march-like melody,

marked *Tempo giusto*, whose robust mixture of grandeur and glee imparts a celebratory mood. The ensuing theme (*Presto*) is playful and also somewhat festive. Only the next melody (*Andante – quasi improvisato*) has a particularly exotic character in its dark, Gypsy-like music. The closing section features a lively theme (*Allegro*) that first takes on a playful manner and then, as rapid octaves hammer out the theme with driving vehemence (*Presto*), the mood turns rollicking and the music challenging to the pianist.

What better pianist to have performing this work than a Hungarian in the person of György Cziffra who received his musical education at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music and who counted among his teachers István Thomán, who was a favourite pupil of Franz Liszt.



The youtube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LORncqx1yQ

Prelude and Fugue on B.A.C.H. S. 260

In the German system of key spellings, the lettering runs from A through H, rather than A through G. Our B-flat is the German B, and B is denoted H. This allows one to spell the name B-A-C-H on the keys, thus:



Bach himself was well aware of this, and used it himself in *The Art of the Fugue*. Other composers have taken the B-A-C-H theme upon themselves as well, but few have done it with such audacity and sheer drama as Franz Liszt.

The Prelude is a fantasia with the BACH theme being stated in the first four notes, and throughout, in the pedals. The Fugue is a fugue only in the loosest sense of the term. The straightforward four-voice exposition is soon punctuated at by growling statements of the BACH theme in the bass, until a sudden transition when Liszt steps up the tempo from *Andante* to *Allegro*, and drops all pretence of a formal fugue. From here to the end is five minutes of razzle-dazzle, with fragments of the fugue subject whirling between cascading scales and intensely chromatic passages.

In the final two minutes of the work, Liszt brilliantly navigates between chromatic passages and magnificent diatonic chords, guiding the ear to a sparkling B flat major resolution. (Diatonic means the notes of the key the piece is being played in. Chromatic is the designation of notes used which are not in the diatonic scale).



The source of the above information on this work says: "Liszt's homage would surely have shocked listeners of Bach's day, and even now is a challenge to Baroque-attuned ears. But after repeated listenings, one has to imagine Bach smiling in appreciation at Liszt's inventiveness and sense of pure intensity and drama".

The organist we hear is Jean Baptiste DuPont playing on the great Cavallé-Coll organ (built 1888) of the Basilica of Saint-Sernin of Toulouse (both pictured), France.



St Sernin (or St Saturnin) was the first Bishop of Toulouse—about the year 250. The Youtube link for this recording is:



www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNlv3p3QKY

Oh Quand Je Dors (When I am Sleeping) from S. 282

Throughout his life Liszt read French Romantic literature and was strongly inspired by it. He also had close relationships with several great poets, especially Victor Hugo. In his early 'virtuoso years' when Paris was his base, the twenty-one-year-old Liszt often visited Hugo's home, and so perhaps it is hardly surprising that Liszt would compose songs to texts by this great French Romantic writer.

Liszt composed over eighty songs in German, French, Italian, Hungarian, Russian, and English. Although most of his songs are set to German poems, the songs in French are among the most significant works, especially those set to poems by Victor Hugo.

"Oh! quand je dors" ("Oh! when I sleep" or "In my dreams") was the first of seven poems of Victor Hugo that Liszt would set between 1842 and 1849. By far the best-known of his handful of French songs, it contains some of his most memorable melodic writing and showcases the ease with which the cosmopolitan Liszt moved between languages and national styles.

Liszt's songs have fallen into general neglect, but "Oh! quand je dors" haunting melody and subtle intensity – not to mention its piano accompaniment (which is considerably more manageable than those of many other Liszt songs) – have helped to secure a place for it, along with a few other favourites, in the repertory.

Kathleen Battle is the soprano we hear. You can listen again on Youtube at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRoZ-LT6wFM

Concert Paraphrase on Rigoletto S. 434



It is said that one picture is worth ten thousand words. In the picture shown, the body language says it all, really. On one side of a wall in a well-lit room is an amorous couple: he, richly and flamboyantly attired, with an arm about her waist; she, dressed provocatively, looking flirtatiously over her shoulder.

On the other side of the wall, beneath a menacing night sky and an inn sign, a lady spies on them, and listens intently with one hand raised in distress, the other arm held or even pulled by an older man. In the background there is a bridge over a river. This is the famous quartet scene from the final act in Verdi's opera Rigoletto.

Liszt chose this scene as the basis of his Rigoletto Paraphrase.

How interesting that Liszt didn't choose to feature 'La Donna e Mobile. Instead, he wisely chose the dramatic heart of the opera, involving four characters:- the denouement scene where Rigoletto takes his daughter, Gilda, to overhear the Duke of Mantua flirting with Maddalena. Gilda is forced to face the reality of the Duke's licentiousness, and all four characters express their different emotions in a masterly aria.

Now to Liszt.

Liszt's paraphrase is no less masterly. It opens with a mini-overture, using brief references to the main musical ideas associated with Maddalena – lively octaves – and Gilda – impassioned, sighing octaves and cries of pain.

A filigree cadenza, almost harp-like in its delicacy, precedes the entry of The Tenor; here is the melody sung by Duke of Mantua, in the rich key of D flat: 'Bella figlia dell'amore', heard in the middle register of the piano. Lightly strummed chords accompany, as they do in the opera. Then the ladies are heard; Maddalena's empty chatter and Gilda's anguished responses, leading to a climax, fff, and some interlocking 6ths in a descending chromatic scale – hmm...

Liszt follows Verdi's harmonies, but when the second verse of the aria is reached, the RH and LH share the melodic material, while taking turns to wreath the phrases in pianistic decoration. Arpeggios sweep the length of the keyboard, chromatic arabesques swirl like curlicues, with dazzling, effortless nonchalance. And all pp – una corda, including the RH chromatic thirds...

Following the original aria, the texture now changes. LH accompanies the new RH octave melody – it is Gilda's voice we can hear, and even the operatic dynamics are closely followed, with a sudden pp as the phrase descends. The material is repeated, but now the melody notes are doubled and quadrupled.

The piece draws to a close as the voices combine in rich harmonies beneath a chromatic halo. And finally – a brisk stampede of Lisztian octaves to finish. Exhilarating!

To help us “get the picture” we listen first to the actual operatic scene as sung by Luciano Pavarotti as the Duke, Isola Jones as Maddalena, Joan Sutherland as Gilda and Leo Nucci as Rigoletto.

Then we turn to the pianist Yundi Li for a very brisk performance of Liszt's paraphrase for which the Youtube link is

www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3ZoKlAwEOs

Should you wish to tune in again to the quartet itself the link is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6S_kxOgDzc

Liebstraum S. 541 No.3



The word “Liebstraum” is German for “Dreams of Love”, and Liszt's work a collection of 3 solo piano pieces, S. 541. Liszt referred to each of these pieces as “Nottornos”, or “Nocturnes”. This was directly influenced by Chopin, whom Liszt was friends with and greatly admired.

When Chopin died in 1849, it was a big blow to Liszt, and he spent time writing music in Chopin-esque genres, such as Etudes, Ballades, and Nottornos, as tribute.

The Liebstraume, or “Dreams of Love”, are all connected in theme – they're all expressing some aspect of love, and the poem for each reflects that.

The three loves, and three songs, are themed as follows:

Religious Love – renouncing worldly love for heaven. This first poem, Hohe Liebe, is all about casting away earthly pleasures for a greater spiritual love. This is reflective of Liszt being a very religious person, especially in his later years. Probably, this is why he placed it first of the three – because to him, spiritual love was above physical and romantic love.

Erotic Love – Seliger Tod (Blessed death) – It's a pretty common thing to relate love to death. There are so many modern-ish songs that equate the two. This is what Liszt is doing in his second song of love. This poem/song deals with the physicality of love, and how even though physicality is considered the “lowest” form of love, it can be a doorway to the “highest” form – heaven, death, and the infinite.

Unconditional Love – This, the third Liebstraum, is the one we'll be focusing on today, titled “Oh love as long as you can”. This Liebstraum is the saddest and most passionate of the bunch, because it's discussing love that extends beyond death. The bulk of the song is this dream of love – of being reunited with a lost love in dreams – only to be brought back to reality, where that love exists no longer.

This song's passionate reminder to live, and love, while you can, may be Liszt's message that life is fleeting and impermanent, but love is forever. We listen to an arrangement for cello and piano played by brother and sister Kalle and Seeli Toivio (pictured previous page).

The Youtube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=eW_MAQjOaIA

The poem is too long to reproduce here but can be accessed on Wikipedia at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O_lieb,_so_lang_du_lieben_kannst

Sardanapolo S. 687

In 1849, Franz Liszt began composing an Italian opera. It was central to his ambition to attain status as a great European composer. But he abandoned it half way through, and the music he completed has lain silently in an archive for most of the time since.



Eugène Delacroix's painting
"The *Death of Sardanapalus*",
which contributed to Liszt's treatment
of the story in his opera.

The story behind Liszt's attempted opera sets Lord Byron's tragedy about war and peace in ancient Assyria. The last King, effeminate in his tastes, is drawn to wine, concubines and feasts more than politics and war; his subjects find him dishonourable (a 'man queen') and military rebels seek to overthrow him, but are pardoned, for the King rejects the 'deceit of glory' built on others' suffering; this leads only to a larger uprising, the Euphrates floods its banks, destroying the castle's main defensive wall, and defeat is inevitable; the King sends his family away and orders that he be burned alive with his lover, amid scents and spices in a grand inferno.

As Byron put it: 'not a mere pillar formed of cloud and flame, but a light to lessen ages.' For his part, Liszt told a friend that his finale 'will even aim to set fire to the entire audience!'

The manuscript contains 111 pages of music, and constitutes the complete first act. It was always thought to be fragmentary and partially illegible, but scholars from Cambridge University deciphered it to international fanfare in March 2017. Liszt's music offers an intensely melodic style, with elements from Bellini and Meyerbeer alongside glimmers of Wagner.

This is, then, Liszt's final published work and we listen to members of the team explain and perform some of the music they have put together. The youtube link is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=edi_S1rkYKA

PS There is an account of the story behind the ongoing project of reproducing this operatic work at:

<http://www.classical-music.com/blog/story-behind-liszts-unheard-opera>