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Source: *The Musical Quarterly*, Jul., 1936, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Jul., 1936), pp. 255-258

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/738869>

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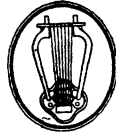
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# THE MUSICAL QUARTERLY

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## FRANZ LISZT, AS MAN AND ARTIST

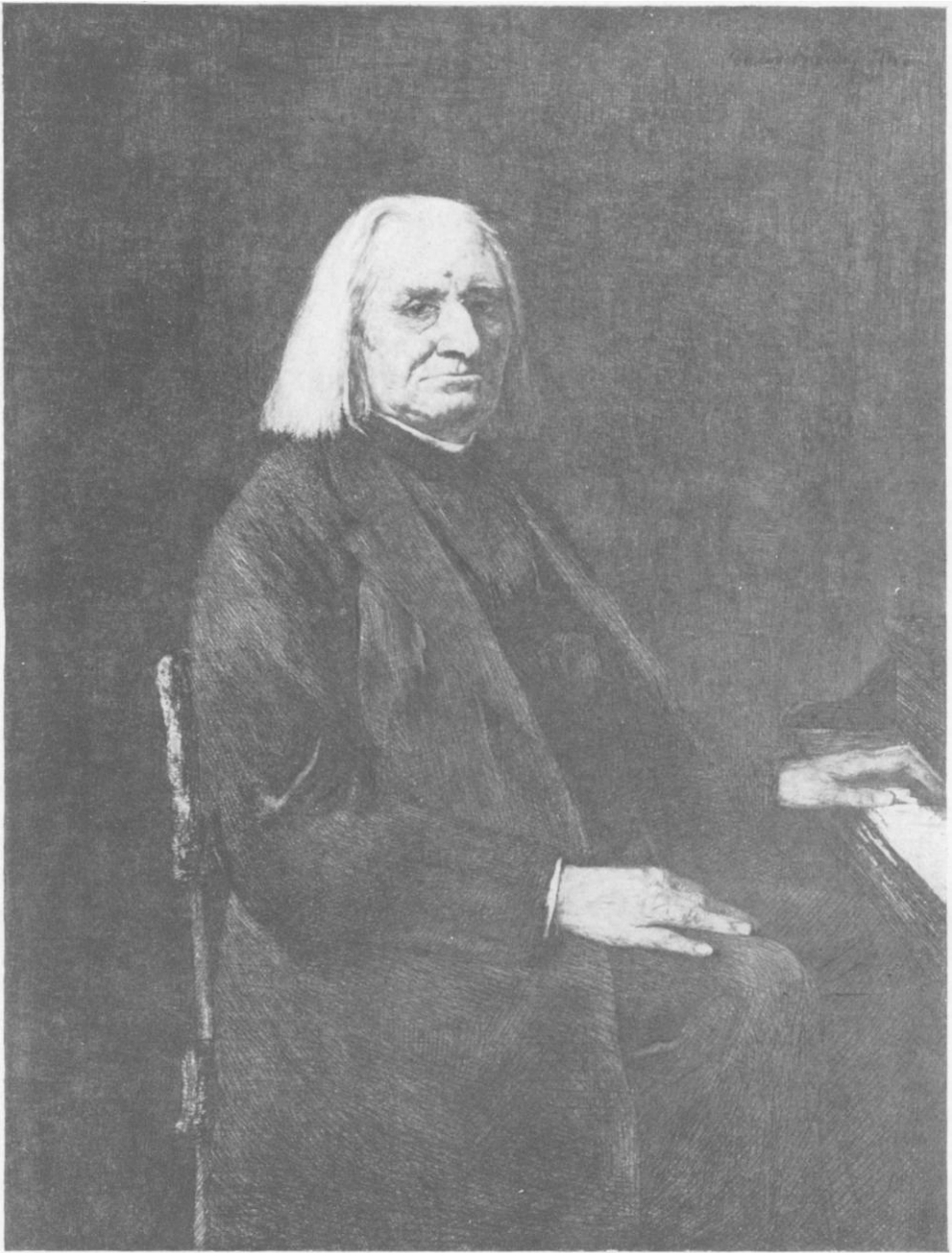
By FELIX VON WEINGARTNER

IT WAS a strange sensation I experienced when in 1881, only eighteen years of age, I boarded in Leipzig the train that was to take me to Weimar. For the first time in my young life, I was about to face one of the really great men in the realm of music. Franz Liszt had very kindly consented to receive me and hear me play some of my compositions.

As I stood before the master, felt the friendly grasp of his hand, and was allowed to behold that wonderful and curiously characteristic countenance with its clear and brilliant gaze, all my shyness—which, under the circumstances, was only too explicable—vanished as if by magic.

At that time, to be sure, I had no idea that my relations with Liszt would grow to be as close as they eventually became. Today—fifty years after his death—, when I read one of his letters to me, or see the dedication in a copy of the score of his “Faust Symphony” that he presented to me “in friendship,” it seems like a dream that then I was found worthy of such a friend.

With Liszt, nobility was innate. To see him among princes, was to recognize him as their king. He possessed a certain aloofness. He was not everyone’s familiar, and was particular in the choice of his associates. But he admitted only intellectual distinctions, and paid no heed to caste. He could treat the simplest musician with warm cordiality, and the



*J. Rippl-Ronai*



*And Munkacsy*

Franz Liszt

From the etching by Joseph Rippl-Ronai, after the portrait by Michael von Munkacsy, painted in Paris a few months before Liszt's death.

highest aristocrat with gentle disdain. He felt respect and veneration for any real artistic accomplishment, for the masters among his contemporaries no less than for those of the past.

It seems to me superfluous today to point out again what he did for Wagner, for Berlioz, for Peter Cornelius, for Joachim Raff, and many others whom he thought deserving of his support. In contrast with the majority, this truly great man did least for himself. He was an altruist of the purest water, always ready to make personal sacrifices or offer help. His innumerable benefactions, throughout his life, he tried to keep secret; it was only by accident that occasionally they came to light.

Thus only can one account for the fact that this man, who during the period of his brilliant concert tours earned fabulous sums of money, had next to nothing when he definitely settled in Weimar, depending for his sustenance upon comparatively small pensions which he received from Budapest and from the Grand-Duke of Saxe-Weimar.

His mode of life—when I knew him—was of the simplest. With no more demands than those of the most modest citizen, he occupied the second floor of the little *Hofgärtnerei* (court-gardener's lodge), consisting of three rooms. His faithful servant, Pauline Apel, procured his frugal meals from some restaurant, or served him a platter of cold cuts.

Even then, he did not stop his charities, his succor to needy musicians and pupils. He was the example of greatness and generosity.

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As lofty as Liszt's character was his art. He went his own way, a way he considered the proper one, looked neither to the right nor left, followed no fashion, asked not for success, but served art in the truest sense of the word. Of his piano-playing I witnessed, of course, only the last display. In spite of his advanced years, to see him sit down at the piano and watch his peculiarly long and marvellously shaped fingers glide over the keyboard, was a memorable experience. It was more than mere play: it was as if the piano, magnetized or bewitched, rendered up enchanting sounds from the very depth of its soul. Liszt's touch was indescribably beautiful. I later heard its quality approached only by two of his pupils: Alfred Reisenauer and Emil von Sauer.

To those who were privileged to call themselves his disciples, or to others whom he occasionally admitted to his almost sacred presence,

Liszt gave with open hands, from the fulness of his knowledge, the riches of his experience, and the ripe fruit of his artistic convictions. Words can not describe, what and how much one was able to learn from him, if one rightly understood him. Often he held back in his judgments, especially about new things, or when he could not be positive in his verdict. He decidedly preferred it if he could distribute praise instead of censure. And censure he generally clothed in irony, which often was extremely witty and pointed. It required sensitiveness to be fully appreciated. Very rarely was his disapproval blunt. All the more lavish and unreserved was his commendation, bordering on enthusiasm, whenever he encountered genuine perfection. Bach and Beethoven were his idols. Sometimes, after some newer music had been heard, he would open a volume of Bach, ask one of his pupils to play from it, and, with peculiarly radiant mien, say: "Now let's get washed!"

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Slowly and with difficulty have Liszt's larger works made their way. Even during the last years of his life, it was rare that one heard some of his orchestral compositions. At the festivals of the *Allgemeine Deutsche Musikverein*, which he had founded, there were always two or three of his works on the program. But otherwise conductors rather neglected him. Some of his pupils—I was one of them—got together and performed his two large symphonies, "Faust" and "Dante," on two pianos, with soloists and small choruses. Long after his death, it continued to be difficult to find a place in concerts for his major works. I can say, with satisfaction, that I have been one of those who never gave up the good fight and again and again insisted on performing Liszt.

The complete edition of Liszt's works (issued by Breitkopf & Härtel) now offers a welcome opportunity to gain a perspective of his vast and rich creative output, and it will help to popularize his lesser known compositions. It is highly desirable that, on both sides of the Atlantic, more of these works should be studied. Not all of them are of the same value; but there are "standard works" among them which deserve to be heard, if for no other reason than that they tried to break new musical ground, and actually did originate a wealth of novel conceptions in melody, rhythm, and musical expressiveness. No less a person than Richard Wagner was obviously influenced by many of Liszt's innovations, which is a credit to Liszt as well as to Wagner.

Whatever position one takes with regard to the symphonic poem, or to program music in general, it must be admitted that Liszt's orchestral scores contain so much that is admirable and bears the mark of genius, that a reaction to it is not only possible but has, of late, made itself strongly felt. Many of Liszt's compositions are beginning to penetrate the world triumphantly, and it becomes ever more evident how unjust was the prejudice of his contemporaries who saw in him only the famous piano virtuoso.

Nor should we forget the literary work of Liszt. His critical essays still furnish interesting reading, and his book about Chopin remains unexcelled as unquestionably the finest and most sensitive appreciation of the master. Liszt was a musical apparition of the first magnitude, and as such he has left us ample and eloquent witness to his greatness. He will live on as a potent factor, far into the future,—unforgettable!

It is gratifying to see how his native land, Hungary, is remembering her illustrious son and aims in every way to honor his memory. His fidelity to the Hungarian soil is shown not only by those of his compositions that directly sprang from it; he proved it also by spending part of each year in Budapest and by keeping up close and cordial relations with many of the artists and notables among his countrymen. Liszt's oratorio, "Saint Elizabeth," is a beautiful document of his loyal attachments. Elizabeth came from Hungary; Liszt found an asylum in Weimar. Thus, in this work, we see united his love for Hungary and Thuringia, the country of his birth and the land that, for many years, offered him shelter. To be sure, Liszt's point of view was international rather than nationalistic, and a personality such as his belongs to the whole world. Nevertheless, the ties with his fatherland were never loosened, nor were those that intimately connected him with Austria and Vienna. Loyalty—especially to his ideals—was one of Liszt's cardinal virtues.

We can apply to Liszt the words that Goethe's Faust pronounces at the end of his life:

*The traces of mine earthly being cannot  
In æons perish,—they are there.*