

A portrait of Franz Liszt, a young man with shoulder-length brown hair, wearing a dark, high-collared coat. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a dark, textured wall.

Franz Liszt

Transcriptions of Lieder

by Franz Schubert,
Robert Schumann and
Clara Schumann

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CARL FISCHER®

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Introduction

It is true that Schubert himself is somewhat to blame for the very unsatisfactory manner in which his admirable piano pieces are treated. He was too immoderately productive, wrote incessantly, mixing insignificant with important things, grand things with mediocre work, paid no heed to criticism, and always soared on his wings. Like a bird in the air, he lived in music and sang in angelic fashion.¹

—Franz Liszt, letter to Dr. S. Lebert (1868)

Of those compositions that greatly interest me, there are only Chopin's and yours.²

—Franz Liszt, letter to Robert Schumann (1838)

She [Clara Schumann] was astounded at hearing me. Her compositions are really very remarkable, especially for a woman. There is a hundred times more creativity and real feeling in them than in all the past and present fantasias by Thalberg.³

—Franz Liszt, letter to Marie d'Agoult (1838)

Chrétien Urhan (1790–1845) was a Belgian-born violinist, organist and composer who flourished in the musical life of Paris in the early nineteenth century. According to various accounts, he was deeply religious, harshly ascetic and wildly eccentric, though revered by many important and influential members of the Parisian musical community. Regrettably, history has forgotten Urhan's many musical achievements, the most important of which was arguably his pioneering work in promoting the music of Franz Schubert. He devoted much of his energies to championing Schubert's music, which at the time was unknown outside of Vienna. Undoubtedly, Urhan was responsible for stimulating this enthusiasm in Franz Liszt; Liszt regularly heard Urhan's organ playing in the St.-Vincent-de-Paul church in Paris, and the two became personal acquaintances.⁴ At eighteen years of age, Liszt was on the verge of establishing himself as the foremost pianist in Europe, and this awakening to Schubert's music would prove to be a profound experience.

Liszt's first travels outside of his native provincial Hungary were to Vienna in 1821–1823, where his father enrolled him in studies with Carl Czerny (piano) and Antonio Salieri (music theory). Both men had important involvements with Schubert; Czerny (like Urhan) as performer and advocate of Schubert's music and Salieri as his theory and composition teacher from 1813–1817. Curiously, Liszt and Schubert never met personally, despite their geographical proximity in Vienna during these years. Inevitably, legends later arose that the two had been personal acquaintances, although Liszt would dismiss these as fallacious: "I never knew Schubert personally," he was once quoted as saying.⁵

Liszt's initial exposure to Schubert's music was the Lieder, what Urhan prized most of all. He accompanied the tenor Benedict Randhartinger in numerous performances of Schubert's Lieder and then, perhaps realizing that he could benefit the composer more on his own terms, transcribed a number of the Lieder for piano solo. Many of these transcriptions he would perform himself on concert tour during the so-called *Glanzzeit*, or "time of splendor" from 1839–1847. This publicity did much to promote reception of Schubert's music throughout Europe. Once Liszt retired from the concert stage and settled in Weimar as a conductor in the 1840s, he continued to perform Schubert's orchestral music, his Symphony No. 9 being a particular favorite, and is credited with giving the world premiere performance of Schubert's opera *Alfonso und Estrella* in 1854.⁶ At this time, he contemplated writing a biography of the composer, which regrettably remained uncompleted. Liszt's devotion to Schubert would never waver.

Liszt's relationship with Robert and Clara Schumann was far different and far more complicated; by contrast, they were all personal acquaintances. What began as a relationship of mutual respect and admiration soon deteriorated into one of jealousy and hostility, particularly on the Schumann's part. Liszt's initial contact with Robert's music happened long before they had met personally, when Liszt published an analysis of Schumann's piano music for the *Gazette musicale* in 1837, a gesture that earned

1 *Letters of Franz Liszt: From Rome to the End.* (H. Grevel and Company, 1894), 164.

2 Eric Frederick Jensen. *Schumann.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21.

3 *Franz Liszt and Agnes Street-Klindworth: A Correspondence, 1854–1886.* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2000), 30.

4 Alan Walker. *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years 1811–1847.* Revised Edition. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 136.

5 Noted in Alan Walker. *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years 1811–1847*, 73, footnote 9. Liszt remarked to his pupil August Göllerich, "Schubert... habe ich nicht persönlich gekannt."

6 *The Schubert Song Transcriptions for Piano: The Complete Schwanengesang.* Introduction by Alan Walker. (North Chelmsford, MA: Courier Corporation, 2013), xi.

Robert's deep appreciation.⁷ In the following year Clara met Liszt during a concert tour in Vienna and presented him with more of Schumann's piano music. Clara and her father Friedrich Wieck, who accompanied Clara on her concert tours, were quite taken by Liszt: "We have heard Liszt. He can be compared to no other player...he arouses fright and astonishment. His appearance at the piano is indescribable. He is an original...he is absorbed by the piano."⁸ Liszt, too, was impressed with Clara—at first the "energy, intelligence and accuracy"⁹ of her piano playing and later her compositions—to the extent that he dedicated to her the 1838 version of his *Études d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini*.

Liszt had a closer personal relationship with Clara than with Robert until the two men finally met in 1840. Schumann was astounded by Liszt's piano playing. He wrote to Clara that Liszt had "played like a god" and had inspired "indescribable furor" of applause. His review of Liszt even included a heroic personification with Napoleon.¹⁰ In Leipzig, Schumann was deeply impressed with Liszt's interpretations of his *Noveletten*, Op. 21 and Fantasy in C Major, Op. 17 (dedicated to Liszt), enthusiastically observing that, "I feel as if I had known you twenty years."¹¹ Yet a variety of events followed that diminished Liszt's glory in the eyes of the Schumanns. They became critical of the cult-like atmosphere that arose around his recitals, or "Lisztomania" as it came to be called; conceivably, this could be attributed to professional jealousy. Clara, in particular, came to loathe Liszt, noting in a letter to Joseph Joachim, "I despise Liszt from the depths of my soul."¹² She recorded a stunning diary entry a day after Liszt's death, in which she noted, "He was an eminent keyboard virtuoso, but a dangerous example for the young...As a composer he was terrible."¹³ By contrast, Liszt did not share in these negative sentiments; no evidence suggests that he had any ill-regard for the Schumanns. In Weimar, he did much to promote Schumann's music, conducting performances of his *Scenes from Faust* and *Manfred*, during a time in which few orchestras expressed interest, and premiered his opera *Genoveva*. He later arranged a benefit concert for Clara following Robert's death, featuring Clara as soloist in Robert's Piano Concerto, an event that must have been exhilarating to witness. Regardless, her opinion of him would never change, despite his repeated gestures of courtesy and respect.

Liszt's relationship with Schubert was a spiritual one, with music being the one and only link between the two men. That with the Schumanns was personal, with music influenced by a hero worship that would aggravate the relationship over time. Nonetheless, Liszt would remain devoted to and enthusiastic for the music and achievements of these composers. He would be a vital force in disseminating their music to a wider audience, as he would be with many other composers throughout his career. His primary means for accomplishing this was the piano transcription.

Liszt and the Transcription

Transcription versus Paraphrase

Transcription and paraphrase were popular terms in nineteenth-century music, although certainly not unique to this period. Musicians understood that there were clear distinctions between these two terms, but as is often the case these distinctions could be blurred. Transcription, literally "writing over," entails reworking or adapting a piece of music for a performance medium different from that of its original; arrangement is a possible synonym. Adapting is a key part of this process, for the success of a transcription relies on the transcriber's ability to adapt the piece to the different medium. As a result, the pre-existing material is generally kept intact, recognizable and intelligible; it is "strict, literal, objective."¹⁴ Contextual meaning is maintained in the process, as are elements of style and form. Paraphrase, by contrast, implies restating something in a different manner, as in a rewording of a document for reasons of clarity. In nineteenth-century music, paraphrasing indicated elaborating a piece for purposes of expressive virtuosity, often as a vehicle for showmanship. Variation is an important element, for the source material may be varied as much as the paraphraser's imagination will allow; its

7 *The Collected Writings of Franz Liszt: Essays and Letters of a Traveling Bachelor of Music*. Ed. by Janita Hall-Swadley. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 27

8 Alan Walker. *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years 1811–1847*, 255.

9 Nancy B. Reich. *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 186.

10 Alexander Stefaniak. *Schumann's Virtuosity: Criticism, Composition, and Performance in Nineteenth-Century Germany*. (Bloomington, ID: Indiana University Press, 2016), 132–133.

11 Alan Walker. *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years 1811–1847*, 347.

12 Alan Walker. *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years, 1848–1861*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 343.

13 *Ibid.*, 344.

14 *Ibid.*, 158.

Fingerings

Following the developments of the damper and una corda pedals in the early nineteenth century, composers came to appreciate that the timbre and tone color of a keyboard instrument with touch sensitivity could be controlled with different types of fingerings, some of which would depart from the more orthodox fingerings of piano pedagogy. Chopin was probably the first to recognize this on the basis of the unique strength of each finger. Charles Rosen notes that, “Chopin...insisted that each finger was fundamentally different in character, and that the performer should try to exploit that difference. His use of the fourth and fifth fingers for delicate chromatic effects became almost a trademark.”³³ He continues by observing, “This sense of the different character of each finger reveals something of the nature of Chopin’s thought; it was subtle gradations of color, inflections of phrasing that interested him.”³⁴

For reasons such as these, Chopin prepared many of his scores with fingerings, which regrettably are often dismissed by modern performers and editors. In many instances, they are considered too awkward for proper execution, when in truth this very awkwardness is suggestive of a subtle musical effect. The three successive indications for the third finger of the right hand in m. 6 of the Nocturne in G Minor, Op. 37, No. 1, by no means an idiomatic fingering, are awkward, yet deliberate, meant to project the weight and power of the bouncing middle finger on these accented notes:

Example 3. Chopin, Nocturne in G Minor, Op. 37, No. 1, m. 6.

The weakness of the fifth finger could be employed for different purposes. In the Nocturne in E \flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2, successive fifth fingers in the right hand, sliding from black to white keys, will assist in realizing the composer’s indication of *poco rubato*:

Example 4. Chopin, Nocturne in E \flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2, m. 26.

Chopin’s fingerings are not overly abundant, but when given are crucial to realize a particular musical effect.

Liszt understood this as well; the mutual influence of these two composers is a fascinating study. Although original fingerings are comparatively less in his scores, those that are given are calls for specific musical effects; as in Chopin’s scores, they must be observed. Many of the fingerings in the Lieder transcriptions are guidelines for the nineteenth-century amateur pianist who would have been unaccustomed to the music’s virtuosity. Those in the Schumann transcriptions are more abundant than those in the Schubert transcriptions, and fingerings in the former are generally more idiomatic to piano technique. However, some fingerings in the Schubert transcriptions show the influence of Chopin’s thought. The successive indications of the fifth finger on three black keys in m. 74 of “Die Post” from *Müllerlieder*, awkward even for the most accomplished techniques, will produce a natural slackening of tempo without the need for a written instruction:

33 Charles Rosen. *The Romantic Generation*, 368.

34 *Ibid.*, 368.

wohl ein - mal hin - ü - ber - seh'n, und

Example 5. Schubert-Liszt, "Die Post," mm. 73–75.

Liszt was also fond of the power of successive thumbs, where the weighted thumb on a series of keys would produce a detached touch in a broad field of tempo. The vocal line in mm. 9–10 of "Der Leiermann" is to be played with successive thumbs of the left hand on white and black keys. By no means a convenient fingering, it will produce the composer's call for a *parlante* effect in conjunction with the *una corda* pedal:

9 Drü - ben hin - term Dor - fe steht ein Lei - er - mann,

Example 6. Schubert-Liszt, "Der Leiermann," mm. 9–10.

A similar notation may be found in the "echo" section of "Ständchen" (mm. 73–74), in which the descending alto voice, marked "*mf marc.*," in the right hand is to be executed with successive thumbs. Admittedly, this is a clumsy execution for the hand, but is a fine means for achieving a *marcato* touch and for broadening the tempo:

Example 7. Schubert-Liszt, "Ständchen," mm. 73–74 (Original Version).

Like Chopin, Liszt used the natural formation of the hands and fingers to obtain specific effects in the most logical, though not necessarily the most convenient way.

Rhythmic Assimilation

A confusing and misleading aspect of interpretation of music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries involves the inexact duration of the augmentation dot and the notation of dotted notes in relation to triplets. What was once a commonly understood notational convention gradually became a forgotten one; it is by no means clear at exactly what point it became forgotten and who exactly forgot it. In baroque performance practice, it was understood that a rhythmic figure such as a dotted eighth note/sixteenth note when played against a triplet figure would be "absorbed" into the triplet; "rhythmic assimilation" might be an apt description. In other words, the notation does not imply a literal execution of two notes (or four notes) against three. Thus:

As noted previously, Liszt's Lieder transcriptions, particularly those of Schubert's Lieder, were immensely popular during the composer's lifetime. They were in great demand by publishers and readily incorporated in recitals by leading performers of the day. Even the most discriminating critics responded favorably to them, particularly when performed by Liszt himself, which he did in multiple instances during the *Glanzzeit*. Liszt most likely never enjoyed this kind of success and the attention that it gave him with his original compositions. And true to their original objective, these transcriptions did much to promote the names of Schubert and Schumann, during a time in which their music was largely unknown. If the great Franz Liszt transcribed and performed a composer's work, then an audience would take notice.

However, changes happened in the years after Liszt's death. Although much of his original piano music has remained in the performance repertoire, the Lieder transcriptions, in fact many of his transcriptions and paraphrases, were forgotten. All of the Lieder transcriptions were excluded from the thirty-four volume Collected Edition published between 1907 and 1936 for unknown reasons.³⁷ Ironically, Liszt's objective in promoting the names of Schubert and Schumann and his success in doing so may have contributed to the neglect of these transcriptions. As the reputations of both composers grew and their achievements were more appreciated, performers and publishers came to believe that attention should be given to the original works, rather than transcriptions of these works. Alan Walker, speaking about Liszt's transcriptions as a whole, observes that, "Between the two World Wars, few pianists ventured onto the concert platform to play a Liszt arrangement. Out of temper with the times, a whole repertoire of wonderful music was hushed up and forgotten."³⁸ Our modern insistence on authenticity, Urtext editions and strict adherence to the musical text has only sharpened these attitudes. Transcription, as an activity in general, has come to be viewed with mistrust.

The neglect of these pieces is unjustified and in need of reassessment. As historical documents, they reveal a wealth of information about interpretation and performance practices in the nineteenth century. As musical documents, their outstanding quality arguably places them on equal par with the originals. As one critic noted of Liszt's Schubert transcriptions: "They were neither variations nor potpourris. These were the simple, heartfelt songs of the divine departed one, from the motives of which the great composer cast thoughtful, simple, and yet so artistic flowers at the tear-stained grave of the great beloved song poet... They are not so much brilliant concert pieces, as one usually encounters today, but rather musical impromptus, in which the song chosen constitutes the foil."³⁹

—Nicholas Hopkins

37 Alan Walker. *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years, 1848–1861*, 257.

38 *The Schubert Song Transcriptions for Piano: The Complete Schwanengesang*, xiii.

39 *Franz Liszt and His World*, ed. by Christopher H. Gibbs and Dana Gooley. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 207.

dedicated to Countess d'Aragon
12 Lieder von Franz Schubert
SW 558 (1837–38)
(Selections)

FRIEDRICH LEOPOLD zu STOLBERG-STOLBERG
(1750–1819)

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797–1828)
Transcribed by Franz Liszt

No. 2. Auf dem Wasser zu singen, D. 774

Moderato
con delicatezza

pp
a piacere

fp

8 1. Mit - ten im Schim - mer der spie - geln - den Wel - len

pp grazioso
un poco marcato il canto

11 glei - tet, wie Schwä - ne, der wan - ken - de Kahn; ach, auf der Freu - de sanft -

mf

14 schim - mern - den Wel - len glei - tet die See - le da - hin wie der Kahn,
cresc.

No. 3. Du bist die Ruh, D. 776

FRIEDRICH RÜCKERT
(1788–1866)

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797–1828)
Transcribed by Franz Liszt

Lento sostenuto

1. Du bist die Ruh, der Friede mild, die Sehnsucht du, und

p molto espressivo ma semplice

Ped. *legatissimo*

7 was sie stillt. Ich weihe dir voll Lust und Schmerz

13 zur Wohnung hier mein Aug und Herz, mein Aug und Herz.

19 2.kehr ein bei

un poco agitato

dolce

24 mir, und schließe du still hinter dir die

dedicated to Archduchess Sophie
Schwanengesang

SW 560 (1838–39)

(Selections)

LUDWIG RELLSTAB
 (1799–1860)

No. 7. Ständchen (*Leise flehen meine Lieder*)

(No. 4 from *Schwanengesang*, D. 957)

(Original Version)

FRANZ SCHUBERT

(1797–1828)

Transcribed by Franz Liszt

Mäßig, tempo rubato

Lei - se fle - hen
mp espressivo il canto

The first system of the musical score is in 3/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes. The piano part is marked *pp*. A pedaling instruction 'Ped. in each measure' is written below the bass line. The system ends with a fermata over a triplet of eighth notes.

*gli accompagnamenti
 sempre staccato e pp*

6 mei - ne Lie - der durch die Nacht zu dir;

The second system continues the piano accompaniment. It includes a fermata over a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The piano part is marked *pp*. Pedaling instructions 'Ped.' are shown below the bass line.

11 In den stil - len Hain her-nie - der, Lieb - chen, komm zu mir!

The third system continues the piano accompaniment. It includes a fermata over a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The piano part is marked *pp*.

16 Flü - sterndschlan - ke Wip - fel rau - schen in des Mon - des

The fourth system continues the piano accompaniment. It includes a fermata over a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The piano part is marked *pp*. The melody in the right hand is marked *mf*.

20 Licht, in des Mon - des Licht; des Ver - rä - ters

The fifth system continues the piano accompaniment. It includes a fermata over a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The piano part is marked *pp*.

Winterreise

SW 561 (1839)

(Selections)

WILHELM MÜLLER
(1794–1827)

No. 4 Die Post
(No. 13 from *Die Winterreise*, D. 911)

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797–1828)

Transcribed by Franz Liszt

Etwas geschwind

leggieramente

The first system of musical notation for 'Die Post' consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a 6/8 time signature. The lower staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The music begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. A 'Ped.' line is shown below the bass staff.

Ped.

delicato ma sempre marcato il canto
1. Von der Stra - ße her ein

The second system of musical notation continues the piece. It features two staves with the same key signature and time signature. The right hand plays chords, and the left hand continues the eighth-note accompaniment. A 'Ped.' line is shown below the bass staff.

(Ped.)

11 Post - hornklingt. Was hat es, daß es so hoch auf-springt, mein Herz?

The third system of musical notation includes the vocal line in the upper staff and the piano accompaniment in the lower staff. The key signature remains two flats and the time signature is 6/8. The piano part is marked *sempre staccato*. The vocal line begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. A 'Ped.' line is shown below the bass staff.

16 was hat es, daß es so hoch auf-springt,

The fourth system of musical notation continues the vocal and piano parts. The piano part is marked *p* and *pp parlante*. The vocal line continues with the lyrics. A 'Ped.' line is shown below the bass staff.

21 mein Herz, mein Herz?

The fifth system of musical notation concludes the piece. It features two staves with the same key signature and time signature. The piano part is marked *fp*. The vocal line continues with the lyrics. A 'Ped.' line is shown below the bass staff.

Ped.

Die Forelle

SW 564 (Second Version, 1846)
(D. 550)

CHRISTIAN FRIEDRICH DANIEL SCHUBART
(1739–1791)

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797–1828)
Transcribed by Franz Liszt

Poco vivace

p leggiero

Ped. _____ Ped. _____

4 **accel.**

cresc.

Ped. _____ Ped. _____

7 **(accel.)**

Ped. _____ Ped. _____ Ped. _____ Ped. _____ Ped. _____

10 *8va*

leggero

loco

Ped. _____

(11) *sempre più f*

fz

p

1. In 2

Ped. _____

Lieder von Robert und Clara Schumann

SW 569 (1874)

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN
(1805–1875)

No. 1 Weihnachtlied
(No. 16 from *Liederalbum für die Jugend*, Op. 79)

ROBERT SCHUMANN
(1810–1856)
Transcribed by Franz Liszt

1. Als das Christ - kind ward zur Welt ge - bracht, das ver - uns von der Höl - le ge -
2. Er - man - ne dich, See - le, die krank und matt, das ver - uns die na - gen - den

Langsam

p

ret - tet, da lag's auf der Krip - pe bei fin - strer Nacht, auf Stroh und Heu ge -
Schmerz - en. Ein Kind ward ge - bo - ren in Da - vids Stadt zum Trost für al - le

sf

bet - tet; doch ü - ber der Hüt - te glänz - te der Stern, und der Och - se küß - te den
Her - zen. O laßt uns wal - len zum Kind - lein hin, und Kin - der wer - den in

fp

Fuß des Herrn, Hal - le - lu - ja, Kind Je - sus!
Geist und Sinn, Hal - le - lu - ja, Kind Je - sus!

f

ten.

p

Alternative Ending

(15)

p

pp

Ped.