

Liszt's Second Visit to Holland, The Rotterdam Festival

The year 1854 is one of the most prolific years of Liszt the composer.

His attention is absorbed in the problems of programme music. Beyond that, as conductor of the Weimar theatre, he could also look back onto a successful season.

In the summer he worked on a symphonic poem called "Hungaria" which is an answer to Vörösmarty's ode: "To Ferenc Liszt". After his planned visit to Rotterdam he wanted to start writing his "Faust Symphony". He hoped to finish it by February of the following year.

As always, he was surrounded by friends, pupils, and guests. This time the young Russian composer and pianist Anton Rubinstein visited him. He also accompanied him to Rotterdam <sup>72)</sup>.

Liszt arrived on July 10th, 1854 for the festival celebrating, the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Toonkunst. He accepted the invitation at least partly because since 1851 he had been a corresponding member of the society.

The society was established in 1829 and within a few years it grew into a large national organization. One of the primary objectives of the society was to organize the public framework of musical education; another was to support and encourage composers and promote their compositions in Holland and abroad. The society also undertook the organization of music festivals and similar events <sup>73)</sup>.

"Het doel der Maatschappij is, de Toonkunst in de Nederlanden door alle mogelijke middelen te bevorderen. Bijzonder zal zij trachten de zucht voor de Toonkunst onder de Natie meer en meer op te wekken en goede musijkale kennis te verbreiden" -we read in the statute of the Maatschappij (first article).



In organizing musical festivals they had to overcome a number of problems and difficulties (organization, financing, personal conflicts, interests, artistic tastes and preferences).

On April 30th, 1830 the society celebrated their first anniversary with a special concert. Four years later on 16th and 17th October, 1834 they similarly celebrated the first lustrum <sup>74)</sup>.

Seeing the success of the Hague festivals the capital felt compelled to catch up. On the April 21st, 1836 J.B.van Bree conducted the first festival concert <sup>75)</sup>.

The third music festival also took place in Amsterdam on May 6th and 7th, 1840.

The conductor was again J.B.van Bree. Here we first meet J.J.Verhulst as a composer. The orchestra played his "Ouverture in C minor".

It is quite probable that in anticipation of the 25th anniversary festival held in Rotterdam, the full, unabridged 9th Symphony of Beethoven was performed here. The festive year of 1854 was preceded by two festivals, held in the Hague in 1842, and in Haarlem in 1850.

In the field of music education also fruitful initiatives were begun. The first royal music school opened to the public in the Hague in 1827, two years before the establishment of Maatschappij. J.H.Lübeck was appointed principal.

The Royal Music School in Amsterdam (Royal School till 1844, thereafter City School) under the directorship of J.G.Bertelman concentrated on singing.

From 1831, Utrecht also had its own song school whose principal was J.H. Kufferath. Regular music and song education began in an institutionalized form in 1834 in Leiden, and in 1839 in Leeuwarden, followed later by other towns as well.

Although we can not speak yet of tremendous changes or real musical growth, they had good reason to celebrate the silver jubilee of the foundation of the Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Toonkunst.



They fulfilled a great many objectives and could feel justifiable pride in national composition and music education. Before now we could not find written reminiscences, however, it is not out of the question that from 1851, Liszt not only favoured the association with his interest and sympathy, but provided them with practical advice and helped them in their work which was often laborious. We can be sure of this from Liszt's correspondence with Vermeulen, which will be dealt with later on.

The direction of the festival was entrusted to J.J.Verhulst, conductor of the Rotterdam affiliate of Maatschappij, his elder colleague Wouter Hutschenruyter was appointed to associate conductor, the "most experienced artist in Rotterdam" and the director of the "Eruditio Musica" concerts.

The "Feest-gebouw" built for this special occasion could accomodate 4000 spectators. In the eyes of a present-day onlooker, even the number of participants seems unbelievable: an orchestra of 173 members, and a choir of 590.

The festivities began on 11th of July with the organ concert held in the Zuiderkerk and followed by an organ concert in the Groote Kerk, on 13th of July. On the same day began the "official" festival opened by the "Feest-ouverture" composed by W.Hutschenruyter for this particular occasion, followed by "Israel in Egypt" by Händel, and performed in Verhulst's rescoring.

On the second day "Die Jahreszeiten" of Haydn was performed while on the third and last day Verhulst's composition the "145th Psalm" and Beethoven's 9th symphony were played. One more "soloist concerto" followed these pieces. The outrageous decision of the festival preparations committee, which was clearly inconsistent with the Maatschappij statutes, i.e. to engage mainly foreign singers and to avoid performing compositions from home composers, caused a fierce outcry in professional circles.




Dr.F.C.Kist indignantly protested against statements based mainly upon foreign criticisms (Süddeutsche Musikzeitung) whereby the Rotterdam festival would take place under the aegis of German art. In his article published in "Caecilia" he vigorously upholds the cause of national art <sup>76)</sup>.

It is quite probable that Liszt on this occasion had the first opportunity to hear orchestral works by Dutch composers, so we take a particular interest in the few written or otherwise extant criticisms or recollections of contemporary musicians.

The following lines can be read on the "Feest-ouverture" composed by W.

Hutschenruyter: "... een werkelijk kunstproduct van goede conceptie, (...) .. door aansprekende motieven, consequente vloeiende behandelingen en brillante instrumentatie uitmuntende" <sup>77)</sup>.

The anonymous critic of the  Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant marked: "... des toondichters bekendheid en ingenomenheid met de onsterfelijke werken van Van Beethoven en diens (!) vormen".

Later on we read: "Aangenaam was het ons bij de repetitie te zien, dat de geniale Liszt en de Russische virtuoos Rubinstein de partituur voor zich hadden, die met gespannen aandacht en bewijzen van hooge goedkeuring volgden en na den afloop, naar wij vernemen, den componist hunne bijzondere goedkeuring te kennen gaven" <sup>78)</sup>.

"Had de feestouverture van den heer Hutschenruyter, den eersten dag reeds algemeen voldaan, dit werk van den kundigen directeur (Verhulst) vond luiden bijval en teregt". -writes the 18th issue of the Utrechtsche Provinciale en Stads-Courant. Both the foreign and the domestic press deals in more detail with the "145th Psalm" of Verhulst, published already in 1852. The resemblance to Mendelssohn is mainly mentioned in connection with the composition "frisch, schoon, gehaltrijk".



The beauty of the themes is emphasized in the German papers, while the same papers miss the logical structure of the work <sup>79)</sup>.

The "Concert Aria" composed also by Verhulst and performed at the soloist concert is not referred to in the periodicals and gazettes. But let us return to Liszt now. From his regular, mostly brief and succinct letters, we can easily reconstruct the events of the Rotterdam festival. Out of these letters merely those of relevance to us are cited:

"Rotterdam, 11 Juillet, Mardi, 7 heures du matin.

(...) A 3 h. 1/2, nous sommes arrivés à Rotterdam. Mon hôte Mr van der Hoop se trouvait sur le quai, attendant mon arrivée. (...) Ce Mr van der Hoop n'est point le banquier, ni même parent de celui-là. Sa position sociale est celle de notaire <sup>80)</sup>.

(...) Une heure après mon arrivée ici, j'ai été à la répétition de l'Israël. Elle a duré jusqu'après 10 heures. Je vous parlerai plus tard de l'ouvrage et de l'exécution <sup>81)</sup>. Roger, Pischek, Formes, Miss Dolby -pour laquelle Mendelssohn a écrit plusieurs de ses parties d'alto- et Mlle Ney sont ici <sup>82)</sup>. (...)

Toute la journée d'aujourd'hui se passera en allées et venues de répétitions <sup>83)</sup>.

(...) Demain Mercredi aura lieu le festival du Yacht-Club, sous la présidence du Pce Henri. Je me suis fait inscrire au dîner, et pour le soir le programme annonce une fête vénitienne. Je ne me fais guère de ce que ce sera <sup>84)</sup>.

Mercredi, 12 Juillet 54, 7 heures du matin.

(...) Ary Scheffer <sup>85)</sup> est aux environs de Rotterdam, à Dordrecht, et j'irai le voir demain ou après-demain. Il a peint beaucoup de portraits ici, mais pas à moindre prix que celui que j'ai encore sur la conscience. Mr van der Hoop m'a parlé même de 4 et 5000 fl.! A propos, j'ai trouvé chez Verhulst <sup>86)</sup>, le directeur musical du festival, une bonne lithographie du tableau que vous possédez maintenant: les Rois Mages.



Je tâcherai de me la procurer. (...)

Hier, j'ai dîné avec Mr May, l'aide de camp du Pce Henri. (...) Je vais aller voir ce matin cette joute de yachts <sup>87)</sup>, et vous en rendrai compte ce soir, un peu tard -car on est toute la journée en l'air. (...)

Rien n'est changé à mes projets de route -et je partirai d'ici soit le 16 au soir, soit le 17 au matin, de façon à arriver encore dans la soirée du 17 à Bruxelles <sup>88)</sup>.

The consecutive letters published by La Mara bear the date 16th July. In the Harvard University archives of letters (Cambridge, Massachusetts) as well as in the letter collection published and translated by Howard E. Hugó <sup>89)</sup> Liszt's letters written on 14th and 15th of July, 1854 are also available, so with only the exception of 13 of July, proper description of these days is given. Here a letter very characteristic of Liszt's style is cited: "Rotterdam and Amsterdam have often been compared to Venice -but yesterday a Dutchman made the wise observation to me, that the comparison could only be understood in a very advantageous way for Rotterdam and Amsterdam: since in these two cities the canals are big enough to hold large merchant ships and steamboats, while at Venice there is only room for insignificant and tiny gondolas. (...)

For all these good reasons, the Dutch can very well dispense with the whim of planning Venetian festivals; while the Venetians would be decidedly embarrassed to treat themselves with this kind of Dutch festival - The Lion of the Netherlands can be hospitable to the lion of Saint Mark; but the latter has become too poor a fellow to do likewise - The Venetian Festival of the day before yesterday (July 12th) consisted simply in the daylight illumination of several small-craft and ships -(...)

Wednesday morning there was a yacht race - I followed a half-dozen of the for a quarter of an hour. (...)



The great Hall intended for the Concerts, which holds about 4000 spectators and from 7 to 800 performers, was made of wood, on the bank of the Meuse, within gunshot of the Yacht Club - Thus it is possible, during the rehearsals, to come and take refuge in the Artist's Salon, and settle the excessively-lively emotions that one would experience. -

After the ceremony of distributing the prizes, at which I was not present, a very nicely served dinner took place at 5 o'clock. I bowed to Prince Henry from five steps away: and later I was told he intended to toast me - but since I had to leave the roast (around seven o'clock) before the toasts had begun, in order not to miss the rehearsal for the Four Seasons, I missed the honor of participating in H.R.H.'s graciousness, for which I am no less obliged - This evening (Saturday) after the end of the 3rd and last Concert - which parenthetically, will last from 4 to 5 hours, for they will play a large Psalm composed by Verhulst, and the 5th Symphony, followed one after another by 9 pieces sung by the soloists: Roger, Formes, Pischek, Miss Ney, etc. (there will also be the Beethoven Sonata dedicated to Kreutzer, played by two young Dutch artists) the whole thing capped by a quartet from Lucia, which will no doubt be the same piece as the inevitable Andante finale - (...) Up to now, none of the members of the royal family have appeared at the Concerts. (...)

Whatever it is, Rotterdam is in bad standing at The Hague; although there were several Ministers and Important People at the music festival, it is doubtful whether there will be a distribution of crosses (as is usually the custom) at this occasion - and the King declined the Committee's invitation, since Rotterdam wasn't sufficiently rightthinking for him at the moment.



Tomorrow morning we're going to Scheveningen with Hiller and several other persons, to call on Ary Scheffer. It's only a short ride from here to The Hague (by railroad), and three-quarters of an hour from The Hague to Scheveningen. We will return here by evening - Monday there is to be a large picnic at Mr. Nottobom's, who owns a superb collection of paintings, among others Scheffer's Faust and Marguerite - and that night I will take off for Antwerp, where I will arrive after an 8-hour crossing in the afternoon of Tuesday, the 18th, so that I may be at Brussels...".

According to the criticism the first day's programme was the least succesful. For Handel's "classical composition one must be a devoted musician to appreciate the real splendour of the work after one performance"- writes the reviewer. By contrast, the second day's programme provided the musical climax of the festival. Haydn's younger and "more modern" composition was more familiar to the audience, because since 1830, the oratorio (on 2nd of September, 1830, under the title of "De Saizoenen" conducted by Mühlenfeld) had been regularly performed.

On the third, and from the programme viewpoint longest, day of the festival Beethoven's 9th Symphony took the limelight. Liszt mentions the 5th Symphony, however, and since I have had no opportunity to see the autograph of the letter in question, the question who was mistake remains open: Liszt or the publisher? Ill-timed from the point of view of programme arrangement, the "soloist concert" taking place after Beethoven's 9th said not to be of a really high-standard and thus criticized unanimously both by domestic and foreign papers, featured two young Dutch artists, the violin virtuoso, composer and conductor Frans Coenen and Ernst Lübeck, the pianist from the Hague. (The first movement of the "Kreutzer" sonata was not played).



As we see, Liszt was well informed. The presentation of the awards, an otherwise inseparable accompaniment to event of this kind, was cancelled on this occasion. Vermeulen counted upon (and rightly) obtaining the eagerly longed for knight's cross and the denial of this meant a wound to his pride that never healed. With the Weimar award (Saksenweimar falcon) --in adjudication of which Liszt also must have played a role-- he felt somehow compensated for the domestic disregard. We can read about this in Liszt's letter of 22 February, 1857 written to Vermeulen <sup>90)</sup>.

Let us resume the account of the festival as Liszt saw it:

"Dimanche, 16 Juillet, 7 h. 1/2 du matin.

Le festival est terminé et a fort bien réussi en somme. Le concert d'hier a duré 4 heures 1/2, et le dîner autant. J'ai fait quantité de connaissances pendant ces quelques jours - et me fais assez bien voir et venir en ce pays, si je ne me trompe. Le Pce et la Psse Henri ont assisté au concert d'hier, de midi à 3 heures. La Princesse a très gracieusement causé avec moi, et ensuite m'a fait inviter à dîner chez eux à la Haye aujourd'hui à 6 heures. Quoique ma journée fût autrement arrangée, j'irai, et ne reviendrai ici que pour éteindre les bougies de la soirée, que mon hôte Mr van der Hoop a organisée à mon honneur.

Je vous ferai occasionnellement une analyse de l'Israël et des Quatre Saisons. Ces deux ouvrages abondent en musique descriptive. Dans le premier, les mouches, les sauterelles, les grenouilles et même les poux - et dans le second tout le règne végétal et animal apparaissent dans l'orchestre. On pourra en tirer quelque profit pour les fatrasies esthétiques.

Au dîner d'hier il m'est venu un à-propos, qui a trouvé son public. En réponse au toast des membres honoraires présent, j'ai rappelé que Beethoven était aussi de notre société - "Maatschappij" - puisque les seules lettres de noblesse dont il avait joui sa vie durant, la préposition "van", il l'avait empruntée à la Hollande. (...)



Scheffer nous avait invités à dîner aujourd'hui à Scheveningen - mais je ne pourrai pas rester aussi longtemps, et dînerai chez le Pce Henri à 6 heures à la Haye.

Lundi, 17 Juillet 54.

Voici ma journée d'hier Dimanche. A 10 heures, parti en chemin de fer pour la Haye avec Hiller et un Monsieur et une dame, dont Scheffer a fait le portrait. En moins d'une heure nous étions à la Haye, où nous montons en voiture pour nous rendre à Scheveningen, ce qui ne prend pas plus de 25 minutes. (...).

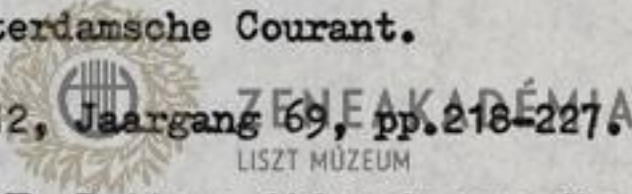
A 6 heures, j'ai dîné chez le Pce Henri, en très petit comité. J'ai fait rouler la conversation sur toutes de sujets. Avant de me congédier, la Princesse m'a demandé de vos nouvelles. Je lui ai offert de lui envoyer nos fatrasies sur le *fliegenden Holländer*. Le Prince a eu l'amabilité de me montrer plusieurs beaux tableaux - entre autres un portrait de Rembrandt, peint par lui-même, ... (...)

A 11 heures du soir, j'étais de retour ici. Mme van der Hoop avait arrangé une grande soirée musicale. Pischek avait chanté avant mon arrivée, plusieurs amateurs avaient joué du piano - et fin finale je me suis exécuté en exécutant deux morceaux: mon Etude et les Patineurs - Amen.


Cet après-midi, je visiterai avec le directeur du musée d'ici, Mr Lamme, parent de Scheffer, la galerie de Mr Nottebom <sup>91)</sup>, ... Le soir, ce même Mr Nottebom donne une fête champêtre, qu'on prétend devoir lui coûter une dizaine de 1000 fl. On parle de 400 invités<sup>92)</sup>.

With these lines Liszt's review of his trip to Rotterdam in 1854 finishes.



- 75) Works from Dutch composers were performed at the two days' concert to represent domestic art; the "Jubelouverture" with the final choir by J.B. van Bree, performed already one and a half year ago in the Hague; J.G. Bertelmann's cantata "De slag bij Nieuwpoort" latter composer was the director of the Amsterdam Royal Music School; and an allegro theme of a symphonia in C minor written by J.W. Wilms, composer of the "Wien Neêrland's bloed".
- 76) "Caecilia" Algemeen Muzikaal Tijdschrift van Nederland, 1854, Elfde jaargang, No.15-17.
- 77) Groot Algemeen Muzijkfeest te Rotterdam, in: "Caecilia", 1854, p.143.
- 78) Liszt's appraisal was also published in the 12th July, 1854 issue of the Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant.
- 79) "Caecilia", 1912, Jaargang 69, pp.218-227.  
  
In his article H. Rutters did not name the titles of the German papers.
- 80) Franz Liszt Briefe, Edited by La Mara, I. Band, (Leipzig, 1893), p.159.  
The steamboats arriving from Arnhem and Germany were waited by a crowd of onlookers at the Rotterdam Oosterkade, among whom Liszt's host was present. In his letter written to his pupil Karl Klindworth on 2nd July, 1854, Liszt mentions the Rotterdam festival and its programme. In the same letter Liszt's host is also touched upon, whose name and profession is mistaken for Hope banker.
- 81) The 30 hours' voyage from Mainz to Rotterdam and an insufficient night rest could not prevent Liszt from attending the rehearsal for Handel's oratorio "Israel in Egypten" soon after his arrival (on 10th of July, Monday, at half past 3 p.m.).  
It is quite probable that the in-depth account of this event took place rather orally and not in written form.



- 82) G. Roger, the first tenor of the Paris Great Opera-House.  
J.B. Pischek (1814-1873) the baritone of the Stuttgart Court Theatre.  
C. Formes (1816-1889) the first bass of the London Opera-House.  
C.H. Dolby, contralto of the London "Sacred Harmonic Society".  
J. Ney, private singer at the Royal Theatre of Saxony.
- 83) In anticipation of the festivities, the orchestral and vocal rehearsals were in full progress since the beginning of the year, which included all the affiliates of the Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Toonkunst. Only in Rotterdam the singers gathered on 46 occasions, sometimes twice a day. Whenever he could do it, J.J. Verhulst personally conducts the rehearsals.
- 84) Franz Liszt's Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, Edited by La Mara, (Leipzig, 1899), pp.198-99.
- 85) Ary Scheffer (1795-1858)  eminent Dutch sculptor-painter, the follower of the French-school. He became famous for his portraits, genre pictures, and historical paintings. In 1837 he painted the Liszt-portrait on which Liszt resemblances the young Napoleon. The painting now is preserved in the Liszt-house of Weymar.
- The lithography of this is in the possession of the Museum of Fine Arts of Budapest.
- 86) Either here or in other sources Liszt did not mention J.J. Verhulst in musical aspects.
- 87) On 12th of July, Wednesday the Yacht-club's rowing competence took place, opened by Prince Hendrik, (younger brother of Willem III, King of Holland /1820-1879/). Other celebrations are also frequent in the town. For instance concert was held in the "Societeit De Doelen", fireworks, serenades were also arranged.



- 88) Franz Liszt's Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, Edited by La Mara, (Leipzig, 1899), pp.200-201.  
Liszt met his daughters in Brussels.

- 89) The letters of Franz Liszt to Marie zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, Edited by E.H. Howard, Harvard University Press, (Cambridge, 1953).

- 90) Dokkum, J.D.C. van, Franz Liszt en zijn betrekkingen tot het Nederlandsche muziekleven in de 19de eeuw met een elftal onuitgegeven brieven, in: De Muziek, Jaargang VII., No.6., (1933, Maart), pp.245-55.

Out of the 11 letters published up till now, 9 originate from Liszt; from these 8 letters were written to Vermeulen, while 1 letter was sent to the festival preparatory committee arranging the seventh festival of the "Maatschappij". There is no information about the availability for the autographs or facsimile copies of the letters, since Dokkum made no mention about this.

Important findings are provided by the following letters.

From the letter of 6th November, 1854, we learn that Liszt was promoted to meritorious member of the "Maatschappij" from the former corresponding fellow. This promotion was much more than simple formality, which is well proved by the invitation letter of the "Maatschappij" in which Liszt was summoned to take part in the jury of the music composition. From the letter of 4 March, 1856, we gain evidence that Liszt also highly appreciated his promotion. He is willing to take part in the various activities of the musical society. From the submitted compositions, the quintet nominated to the first place and appreciated in detail by Liszt did not receive the first place.

The "Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Toonkunst" invited Liszt to the Arnhem music festival.



In his letter of 30 August, 1860, Liszt politely refuses the invitation. Nonetheless, at the same time he takes the opportunity to tell about the programme-policy of the society and the cause of the modern music: "Aussi est ce avec une véritable satisfaction, que j'ai vu dans votre Programme, Messieurs, une juste et légitime part faite à l'art contemporain par l'exécution de quatre ouvrages considérables de M.M. Verhulst, Van Eyken, Coenen et Hiller; et puisque j'ai l'honneur d'appartenir à votre Société, permettez moi de vous complimenter de prendre ainsi sérieusement à tâche de correspondre à un titre "Tot bevordering der Toonkunst" en ne suivant pas les errements prohibitifs contre des nouvelles partitions, de plusieurs autres Comités de Festival. Sur ce point a fait montre d'un peu trop de zèle d'outre tombe, ce me semble; car sauf erreur je ne crois pas que la meilleure méthode d'honorer les morts illustres consiste à dénigrer à tout prix les compositeurs vivans et d'empêcher que leurs oeuvres soient produites convenablement dans de grandes occasions, quelque commode et en vogue que soit cette pratique encore aujourd'hui".

- 91) The wealthy Rotterdam merchant and art-collector, J.A. Nottebohm invited the participants and guests of the festival to a garden-party due on 17, July. Liszt was also amongst the invitees, so his departure was put off till the next day.

Nottebohm bequeathed his splendid painting collection (mainly from French artists) to the town of Antwerp.

- 92) Franz Liszt's Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, Edited by La Mara, (Leipzig, 1899), pp.201-205.

In this source can be read first of all, that Liszt gave concert -although not in public- during his stay in Rotterdam.

Sitwell is mistake, when he writes that Liszt was one of the participants of the Rotterdam Musical Festivities. (Sitwell, S., Franz Liszt, /London, 1934/, trans. W.Reich, /Zürich, 1958/, p.197.).