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Ms. 108

SKETCHES, DRAFTS AND REVISIONS: LISZT AT WORK

I have been asked to speak about sketches, drafts, and revisions in the music of Franz Liszt. And as if you have not heard enough from me about this already, I hope today to look at this problem from a different angle, perhaps an angle with which only we as Liszt scholars have to contend.

Most other musical source scholarship involves clearly defined idea sketches, secondary sketches, compositional drafts, final printer's copies, authoritative printed editions and in some cases, revisions. Each stage is not only self-contained but also clearly traceable as we progress through the stemma. However, with the evidence of the Liszt sources we find that this utopian picture of the genesis of any work can and often **is** clouded by two factors. Many of the steps I have just mentioned are unaccounted for in the extant sources, and not just because the MSS were lost either during or after the composer's lifetime. An artist who earned his living for nine years in a constant series of concert tours, often called upon to improvise upon materials suggested by an enthusiastic audience, surely did not write down everything he played. He knew it from memory; and as he was the only one playing it at that moment, no written music was necessary. This facility, acquired at an early age, stayed with him throughout his life.

And, as I have stated before, we must bear in mind that " . . . an immense amount of intricate composition went on

inside Liszt's head. Pieces were sometimes highly evolved before he ever put pen to paper, and the process was the same whether the material was 'original' or based on the music of another composer."[1] This obscuring of the direct transmission of the music is exacerbated by this composer's ability and willingness to explore the inherent possibilities in **any** musical material, whether original or borrowed from others. Both these factors can and did result in missing steps, that is, MSS, in the line of transmission. I should like to explore the implications of these two factors, as a way of gaining greater understanding into the way in which Liszt composed music.

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There is both a syntactical and taxonomic inadequacy when applying the terms SKETCHES, DRAFTS and REVISIONS to Liszt's music. As with any composer, Liszt only had to write down what he thought he could not remember or what he particularly did not want to forget. I have spoken before about the contents of the Liszt sketchbooks, but let me briefly remind you that of the nine that survive in public collections (all in Weimar), only two (N1, the Ce qu'on entend sketchbook, and N8, the Lichnowsky Sketchbook) truly meet the accepted definition of "sketchbook:" that is, they record brief motivic ideas that are sometimes more fully developed into larger structures in

other documents. The other sketchbooks are more correctly termed "Draftbooks", and we should begin to refer to them as such. Although they may contain brief motivic sketches, more often they are devoted to extended workings-out of musical material that is not found in any earlier written form: Draftbooks N2 (The Mazeppa Draftbook), N3 (the Prometheus Draftbook), N5 (The Tasso Draftbook), N6 (The Revolutionary Symphony Draftbook), N7 (The Hugo Songs Draftbook), and N9 (The Harmonies poétiques Draftbook)--as well as the recently recovered early Lord Londonderry Draftbook sold at Sotheby's in May--all meet these criteria.

When one looks over the entire corpus of MS materials, the number of sketches in relation to the succeeding compositional documents is astonishingly small. Some would argue that smaller sketches existed for many works but were subsequently discarded by Liszt after their incorporation into a later stage of musical development. However, after many years of investigation into the way Liszt composed, I would say that this was not the case.

Sketching is a composer's method of regulating the compositional process. It allows him to think through various stages in the evolution of a melody, harmonic sequence, rhythmic or formal unit. That Liszt often skipped this stage is an indication of the speed with which he conceptualized his work. Preliminary, what I have termed "primitive," sketches simply do not exist for the majority of his works: the pieces

were full-blown by the time they reached the writing stage, often after many trial performances. In addition to the extant Weimar sketch- and draftbooks, we have several large portfolios of miscellaneous musical mateials from across sixty years of the composer's lifetime. These do contain sketches--for instance, the preliminary Faust materials. But unlike Faust, the majority of these never reached a more highly developed stage of composition. Newly recovered MSS of important compositions--for example, the recent Christie's MS of A la Chapelle Sistine, almost always reflect what we term later compositional phases.

However, one characteristic feature of the extant Liszt sketches that were developed into larger compositions remains constant: the initial musical inspiration holds fast throughout decades of substantial rethinking. The clearest example of this are the sketches for the Petrarch Sonnets. Inscribed into the Lichnowsky Sketchbook (N8) some time in late 1844 or early 1845, the basic melodic material and its harmonic implications remained the same through 35 years of revision. Liszt was never able to satisfy himself with these pieces, as his constant shifting between the genres of piano and song shows. And too, while apparently devoted to the principal melodic formula of Sonnet No. 47, Liszt tinkered with it constantly. This illustrates a problem that seems to be critical for Liszt--that the composer was always developing the multiple possibilities in a single musical thought. This led

to his writing at least two other, distinctly varied settings of the same text, one from ca. 1844 (WRgs MS D77) and the other ca. 1854 (WRgs MS D58); both remain unpublished. Both were taken well beyond the sketch stage, but were ultimately discarded. Yet their MS sources remain to document Liszt's unending fascination with the musical implications of several levels of the Petrarch compositions.

The best word that describes the working document Liszt produced in all genres is the neutral word draft, usually indicating a state of a piece with several layers of completeness evident, **one of which might be primitive enough to be described as a sketch.** In piano music, such ideas are succeeded by drafts in varying degrees of finality, as in the case of the Petrarch Sonnets. In the songs, by contrast, most often the initial state appears to have been a fully-realized draft put down without any predecessor, followed by numerous revisions--both of component sections and states of the music. I view the versions of "Anfangs wollt' ich fast verzagen" and Liebestraum II, Gestorben war ich, which may have begun as a song, as examples of this process. In the only extant music for his opera, Sardanapale, found in MS N4, we find material ranging from the solo vocal line with text (but without accompaniment) to a draft for an extended orchestral interlude.

But in symphonic music we find drafts ranging in size and content from single lines--the main theme of Tasso found in MS N1--to clusters of chords combined with melodic lines or fully-

developed sections with completely-realized phrases and instrumentation indicated--such as the materials for Ce qu'on entend. Within sections of these drafts, he sometimes worked quickly, writing an aide-mémoire or a suggestion of the fuller texture, then going back and forth and adding instrumentation at the same time as the music was being composed. In other sections, he worked more slowly, returning to add instrumentation after the completion of a portion. In still others, he drafted sections and never fully completed them with either accompanimental material or instrumentation, and only in subsequent copies by one of his scribes do we find the final realization of the ideas nascent in Liszt's original plan. Because there is no intermediate MS in Liszt's hand documenting this later stage, Liszt's authorship of some works has been challenged: we have always been troubled by the implication that Liszt's copyists were not only involved in the instrumentation of his works but also had much to do with the composition as well. However, from Liszt's compositional point of view, this was not the case. When one examines the sources, it is clear that by the time Liszt handed a copyist an orchestral draft for the preparation of a fair copy, the "compositional process" had already ended for him, and all that remained was the mechanical task of preparing a full score.

We must now turn to the body of sources which makes up the largest and most problematic part of the manuscript corpus: the REVISIONS. We have of necessity touched on these before,

when I outlined the problems with the syntactical nomenclature for Liszt. There is much further confusion here, centered around the point that for Liszt, drafts in one medium often functioned as revisions of another medium--for a succeeding state of the musical text. For example, the 1847 transcriptions of the Hugo Songs stand between the 1844 and later song versions. Liszt drafted piano transcriptions, but never published these substantially revised versions. Instead, he used the 1847 musical text as the springboard for the later revisions of the songs themselves. The transfer of medium from song to piano was then not just a draft for the piano: it doubly functioned as a revision for the songs.

To take another example, both piano 4-hand and 2-piano versions of the symphonic poems--Les Préludes is a classic case--served as connecting links between different (that is, earlier and later) orchestral versions. The impetus for the Les Préludes revision was the anticipated performance of the symphonic poem in a piano 4-hand version by Liszt's pupils Hans von Bronsart and Dionys Pruckner on 27 March 1855. The musical changes in the 4-hand MS, a Liszt autograph found in the Rosenbach Collection in Philadelphia, were later transmitted to the Stichvorlage for the 1856 Breitkopf edition of the orchestral version of the symphonic poem, a MS in the hand of Joachim Raff. We know that there were similar musical changes in the 2-piano version of the same piece, and it too may have served as a Zwischenstufe between the earlier Liszt orchestral

MSS and the Raff Stichvorlage. Unfortunately, the 2-piano MS is in a private Swiss collection and was only exhibited once in 1975--long enough for Tilman Seebass to note the discrepancies between it and the published version of the symphonic poem.

But here, "modern scholarship" intruded on the classification of the Liszt sources and considerably muddied the waters. Peter Raabe, from 1910 the curator of the Liszt Museum, produced a catalogue for the collection in Weimar, and attempted to establish the hierarchy of the various source materials representing successive stages of a work. But Raabe failed to realize--and I now quote from my recent article in 19th Century Music, that " . . . given Liszt's propensity for revision at all stages of composition, the qualitative difference between an Urschrift and an Abschrift was often rendered meaningless. This in turn often blurred the distinction between a Zwischenstufe and a totally separate Fassung in its own right. This misrepresentation of sources, [Raabe catalogued MSS N1 through N9 as **Skizzenhefte**] as well as the all-too-frequent misidentification of the scribal hands . . . and the complete absence of any attempt to analyze the papers, has confounded most previous attempts to establish an accurate chronology of many works . . . [T]his aspect of research provides not only crucial but indispensable information for any attempt to distinguish among the different types of sources or different compositional stages in the evolution of a work."[2]

Our task in the present day is to approach the Liszt compositional materials as the composer himself did. We cannot start with the preconceptions that have been overlaid on musical source scholarship by the study of Mozart, or Beethoven, or Wagner. We have to establish Liszt`s train of thought, however anomalous it may be to what we are used to, and allow the path to lead us where it will. To that end, I wish to discuss certain overriding principles that I consider crucial when looking at Liszt's music, and which must govern the way in which we perceive the sources.

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We must come to grips with the fact that while Liszt was first and foremost a keyboard performer, his compositional instincts were also governed by a vocal ethos, a strong feature of the age in which the composer lived and worked. This accounts for the regularity with which we face the "chicken or the egg" question with songs and piano works. The repertoire of the concert pianist was still being established when Liszt was at his peak of concertizing. As with all artists of his calibre, he needed to freshen his programs not only with "new" music (like Schumann's Carnaval) but also with music with which the audience was familiar--such as famous operatic tunes or Lieder. "Pot-boilers" such as the sextext from Lucia or the Robert le Diable and Don Juan transcriptions made Liszt into a

household name. Carnaval initially failed with audiences. Not only was it too sophisticated, but more importantly, it lacked the requisite "vocal" element: one had to hear the work a few times before one could come away humming the tunes.

Liszt was never very far from the vocal medium in any of his compositions, and formulaic elements from opera and song permeate his thinking. Strophic forms are common, and prove agreeable to the ear, for they provide coherence without tedium. More importantly, they lend themselves ideally to transcription or paraphrase or fantasizing at the keyboard, depending on which level of elaboration Liszt chose to apply. When these vocal elements appear in instrumental genres, their success often depends on whether or not they--the vocal elements--were implicit in the initial stages of the work. Thus, the final chorus at the end of the Faust Symphony, not envisioned until at least two years after the completion of the orchestration draft, appears poorly integrated in the work. Yet its presence reflects Liszt's strong predilection for a vocal conclusion to the symphony. By contrast, the brilliant accomplishments of his Lieder and most of the sacred choral music, as well as the majority of his transcriptions for the piano, are accounted for by virtue of their original texted roots.

Another strong element Liszt found just as compatible as the vocal ingredient are the structures of dance forms. These forms, replete with their formulaic internal repetitions, exert

the same kind of authority over the composition as the strophic elements in vocal music mentioned before.

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A new concept that we must recognize is what I call the "Anthologizing Principle"--the superimposition at some later point of a larger framework on a body of pre-existent music.

Liszt often collected his works into sets post factum, often at the behest of a publisher, stringing them together with artful and often tenuous connective images drawn from extra-musical associations. The anthologizing principle was at work in sets such as the first Album d'un Voyageur (which became the Swiss volume of the Années de Pèlerinage) and the Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, but it was not initially the means by which the individual pieces themselves were composed. Suisse concentrates on naturalistic descriptions of locations, whereas the Harmonies poétiques rely on the skillful alternation between visionary images and texted religious meditations.

To take more examples of this notion, Liszt may have conceived the second volume of the Années de Pèlerinage (Italy) as a geographical tour of Italy, according to the 1843 inventory we find in the Lichnowsky Sketchbook, but he built the set upon a core of pre-existing compositions, the Petrarch Sonnets, and expanded it with the addition of pieces that had

similar Italianate inspirations but which had been composed independently (the Dante Sonata, Il Penseroso, Spozalizio, and the Canzonetta dal Salvatore Rosa). The separability of the component gatherings of the MS of the deuxiéme Années (MS I13) exemplifies the anthologizing principle at work. Gatherings of different sizes made up of different papers demonstrate clearly that the assembling of the volume took place late in the history of the work and utilized music composed over a substantial period of time.

And he planned an entirely German Années volume, but this was never written for piano. He viewed the Hungarian Rhapsodies as a "Nationalepos," as Detlef Altenburg pointed out in 1986, an idea prompted by the political circumstances of Hungary as a member of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. And he linked the Historische ungarische bildnisse thematically and tonally into a unified set we have only come to appreciate through the recent work of Deszö Legány. Similar parallels for the collecting of songs into sets can be drawn.

Whether the large-scale impetus was tonal, textual, geographical, political, or visionary, Liszt assembled the larger sets as if out of little building blocks--that is, the individual pieces themselves. Unavoidably, this increased the incidence of "weak" pieces in strong sets: Liszt was often forced to fill in a gap at the last minute by restyling older pieces just for the occasion. We need think only as far as the Dante Sonata, which Liszt refashioned for inclusion in the

deuxième Années de Pèlerinage, but which clearly stands out of place in that set if only because of its scale.

The assembling of large sets out of individual pieces also spotlights another important aspect of his conceptual thinking: the application of this process on the smaller dimension--the internal constructions of any given piece.

Liszt's tended to compose in small sections. Whether or not the options for continuation were eventually governed by melodic or harmonic considerations, one factor characterizes these sections: that is, manifold possibilities of resolution. The composer moved these sections around to different pitch levels and in different structural relationships, with what appears initially to have been a fairly casual interest in the overall form, juxtaposing bits and pieces that worked as individual units and then welding them together into a larger whole. As a result, the linking material assumed great importance structurally, because it joined sections that seemed disjunct in most musical perspectives. In a sense, these articulations or seams are the clues to his thinking. What happened when he took components A and B and tried to link them? Either he had to supply suitable connective tissue or somehow modify A or B so that they would interlock. The sources reveal that, in an effort to bridge the gaps, the composer often relied upon the repetition of whole sections each with a different tonal goal, thereby effecting the proper combination. This paralleled Liszt's expanding (and expansive)

concept of harmonic freedom, and the enrichment of the harmonic palette with which he worked. In turn, this extrapolation of the musical resources allowed him room to experiment and move between sections that were formerly considered as being widely separated tonally.

The song "Anfangs wollt' ich fast verzagen" is the prime example of the manner in which he solved the problem of moving between a tonic and a contrasting tonality, in this case separated from the former by a semitone. The solution, the working out of which is documented in five MSS (two in his hand and three by copyists), did not present itself for approximately eight years--and then, it was of the utmost clarity, a shift accompanied by a stepwise chromatic progression.

As Liszt drew on his experiences with the Weimar orchestra, his ability to deal with form in larger works developed in this unique way. Again and again, the sources reflect pieces that begin on a rather small scale and which Liszt expanded at the seams--not by a systematic process of sketch to draft to full score, but by preparing a partially complete draft and then proceeding as has been described above. This fitted perfectly with the growing concept of "symphonic poem", a notion only brought into play after his exchange of letters over the Faust project with Wagner in 1852.

The works mentioned were not creations that depended upon traditional notions of form, because Liszt was not a composer in the way Schumann or Chopin were. Neither did he choose to

follow a large-scale psychological plan inherent in a work (Beethoven), or opt for a massive dramatic plan (Wagner). The manipulation and satisfactory ordering of small compositional units, as well as the larger blocks within which they were contained, was the process by which he arrived at the completed work--a kind of "anthologizing" on several different levels of conception. Throughout his compositional career, this method was the most fundamental aspect of the way in which he worked.

Liszt's was an eternally restless creative imagination, often unable to settle in advance on a particular master plan for a work. His mind continually altered the genetic controls of pieces as they developed. His processes resemble anthologizing as I have described it above--the continuous adjustment of freely developing ideas, and the superimposition at some later point of a larger framework. Liszt's approach to composition was conceptually flexible enough to enable him to shift a piece between genres and make the change appear effortless in the finished product. However, unlike any of the composers that I mentioned before, Liszt was able to streamline a finished product often out of materials which, even in his mind, were constantly in a state of flux. Liszt has been unjustly maligned by many critics--unjustly because their complaint has been that he did not do what they considered correct. In fact, and I suggest here, Liszt's procedures were merely different, perhaps more adventurous and more "romantic" (at the very least, more consistently spontaneous), certainly

presenting an intense view of romanticism--a view without organic growth and with evolving shapes as limiting forces.

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How do we approach a new classification of the sources? In the first place, by recognizing that these varying levels of conceptulization and finality exist. This certainly involves renaming "sketchbooks" "draftbooks," thereby recognizing the true nature of the source materials themselves. In the second place, we must evaluate the interplay of the sources within an almost three-dimensional, living model of their transmission--one which takes into account the various faces of revisions and Zwischenstufen. In some instances, we may never know what the composer considered "die Fassung letzter Hand", and perhaps Liszt wanted it that way. But in our effort to establish taxonomic order, thereby avoiding the egregious errors of the past, we must show the same pliabilty in evaluating the materials that Liszt showed in their creation.

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2.Mueller, "Reevaluating the Liszt Chronology," 134.