

**Liszt and Verdi: Piano Transcriptions
and the Operatic Sphere**

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Abstract

Liszt's piano transcriptions amount to at least half of his overall output for the piano, yet, according to Jonathan Kregor, research into this important compositional genre is still largely concerned with uncovering the level of fidelity between Liszt's copy and the work he has transcribed. Subsequently, the transcriptions discussed in this thesis are placed in a more nuanced context, enabling links to be drawn between Liszt's works based on Italian operas and his own ambitions to compose an original opera. Through a broader consideration of their overall context, the transcriptions are discussed in light of the contemporaries whose works Liszt transcribed. My conclusions, exemplified by the comparison and analysis of two transcriptions based on the same source material, highlight the very way in which Liszt came to understand the dramatic nature of Italian opera, and how this is reflected in his transcriptions of this genre.

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Liszt and Transcription

Franz Liszt completed at least as many arrangements and transcriptions as he published original compositions.¹ With a total output for piano of well over 1000 pieces (including revisions),² the scale of his dedication to the art form he “basically invented”,³ and the importance it held within his own musical development, is unquestionable. They encompass the entire panoply of musical styles and, fittingly, span his entire career as a composer. Ranging from intimate studies of the ‘Chants polonais’ (S.480) by Chopin, through retrospective homages like the ‘Fantasia and Fugue in G minor’ (S. 463) after J. S. Bach, to colossal symphonic transcriptions, the crowning achievement of which are the *partitions de piano* of Beethoven’s nine symphonies (S. 464), Liszt’s transcriptions surveyed anything and everything as part of his developing tastes in music. So far, however, the approach to this important field of research has ‘largely been concerned with uncovering the level of quantitative fidelity that Liszt’s ostensible copy shares with the original composition’,⁴ and, as Jonathan Kregor goes on to highlight in his recent book ‘Liszt as Transcriber’, little consideration has been given to the ‘contextual dimensions’ of these works. As it stands, scholarly work on Liszt’s transcriptions ‘overlooks many of the musical and social issues in which a fundamental component of nineteenth-century culture like the piano transcription could be implicated’.⁵ Michael Saffle reiterates this point when highlighting emerging research in his article, commemorating the bicentenary of Liszt’s birth, ‘The Liszt Year 2011: Recent, Emerging, and future Liszt research’: ‘Liszt wrote more transcriptions than any other important nineteenth-century composer, and they exemplify and illuminate virtually every aspect of his creative career’.⁶ By cross-referencing this with Saffle’s book, ‘Franz Liszt: A

¹ M. Saffle: *Franz Liszt: A Research and Information Guide* (London, third ed., 2009), p. 455

² Since an all-encompassing chronological catalogue of Liszt’s compositions is not in existence, this number is based on the mammoth recording cycle completed by Leslie Howard for Hyperion Records. It incorporates every piano piece attributed to Liszt, including a large number previously unknown before Dr. Howard discovered them or pieced them together from sketches.

³ Letter from Liszt to Count Géza Zichy, 3 August 1880. J. Kregor: *Liszt as Transcriber* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 1

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ M. Saffle: ‘The Liszt Year 2011: Recent, Emerging, and future Liszt research’, *Notes*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (June, 2011), p. 676

Guide to Research', which surveys the large body of publications dealing with the composer, we see that his assertion that 'for almost the first time, the forgotten majority of Liszt's musical output is finally being examined'⁷ is an apt statement.

The way in which research has been carried out in this field is not the only issue, however. Significant portions within Liszt's output are still overlooked, and a glance over Saffle's survey corroborates this. There is a pocket of compositions, and composers, which have been the main focus of the majority of published research in this area, including: Berlioz and the *Symphonie fantastique*;⁸ Schubert and his *lieder*;⁹ Beethoven and the symphonies;¹⁰ Bellini's *Norma* and, to a lesser extent, *La Sonnambula*;¹¹ Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*;¹² Verdi's *Rigoletto*;¹³ and Wagner.¹⁴ As well as disregarding a large quantity of Liszt's transcription output,¹⁵ the considerable majority of these studies handles the material in the way Kregor summarises, either by showing the level of 'quantitative fidelity' Liszt's transcription shares with the original, or merely a technical study highlighting the way Liszt has adapted the music

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ J. Kregor: *Liszt as Transcriber*, pp. 41-74 (also as 'Collaboration and Content in the "Symphonie fantastique" Transcription' in the *Journal of Musicology* 24 (2007), pp. 195-236), P. Friedheim: 'The Piano Transcriptions of Franz Liszt', *Studies in Romanticism* 1 (1961), pp. 83-96, W. Hughes: 'Franz Liszt: Symphonist of the Keyboard', *The Music Review* 55 (1994), pp. 1-12

⁹ J. Kregor, pp. 75-111, D. Wilde: 'Transcriptions for Piano' in *Franz Liszt: The Man and His Music* ed. A. Walker (1970), pp. 168-201, P. Friedheim, A. Walker: 'Liszt and the Schubert Song Transcriptions', *The Musical Quarterly* 67 (1981), pp. 50-63, D. O. Norris: 'Liszt's "Winterreise"', *The Musical Times* 126 (1985), pp. 521-525, H. Weber, eds. A. Laubenthal & K. Kusan-Windweh: 'Liszts "Winterreise"', *Studien zur Musikgeschichte: Eine Festschrift für Ludwig Finscher* (1995), pp. 591-602

¹⁰ J. Kregor, pp. 112-148, D. Wilde, W. Hughes, Z. Domokos: "'Orchestrationen des Pianoforte": Beethovens Symphonien in Transkriptionen von Franz Liszt und seinen Vorgängern', *Studia Musicologica* 37 (1996), pp. 249-341, A. Walker: 'Liszt and the Beethoven Symphonies' in *Reflections on Liszt* (2005), pp. 11-26, A. Tollefson: 'The Liszt "Pianoforte Scores" of the Beethoven Symphonies', *Piano Quarterly* 23/89 (Spring, 1975), pp. 46-49, A. Rehding: 'Liszt's Musical Monuments', *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer, 2002), pp. 52-72

¹¹ D. Wilde, C. Suttoni: 'Opera Paraphrases' in *The Liszt Companion*, ed. B. Arnold (2002), pp. 179-191, B. A. Crockett: *Liszt's Opera Transcriptions for Piano* (dissertation, University of Illinois, 1968), A. Schaeffner: 'Liszt transcripateur d'opéras italiens', *La Revue musicale* (May, 1928), W. Schenkman: 'Liszt's Reminiscences of Bellini's "Norma"', *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 9 (1981), pp. 55-64

¹² C. Suttoni, A Schaeffner

¹³ C. Suttoni

¹⁴ C. Suttoni, B. Crockett, S. Schibli: 'Richard Wagner/Franz Liszt: Isolde's Liebestod', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 146/9 (September, 1985), pp. 28-30

¹⁵ M. Saffle (June, 2011), p. 676

for piano. The shortcomings of this method are summarised by Roger Parker and Carolyn Abbate:

The analysis that merely describes musical events is like the translation that passes over all meaning, that passes over the 'truly poetic'. To go beyond mechanical conversions of musical notation into written words, analysis must uncover something beyond or behind the mere sonic surface.¹⁶

Another trend that pervades the current writing on this subject area, as demonstrated by the articles and publications cited above, is the depth of the studies - hardly any of them stretch to beyond thirty pages, with most roughly ten pages long. Quality is, of course, prized over quantity, but in order to engage properly with a field of composition as complex and varied as transcription, a greater number of extended studies are needed.

For those who see the transcriptions simply as a product of the mid-nineteenth century rise of the virtuoso and 'pianist-composer', the numbers alone raise serious questions against this explanation. Why would Liszt continue to transcribe and arrange other composers' works well beyond his retirement as touring virtuoso, right up until his death, if this art form didn't possess a deeper meaning or interest than mere mechanical reproductions? Kregor's book should be welcomed as the starting point in a much wider exploration of the social, political, and contextual issues and considerations Liszt would have faced when transcribing a composer's work. However, even 'Liszt as Transcriber' doesn't fully deliver in the way its author intends. The selection of composers and works explored in the book is typically canon-centric: Berlioz and the *Symphonie fantastique*, Schubert and his *lieder*; the Beethoven symphonies; Wagner (*Tannhäuser* and *Tristan und Isolde*); and a final chapter discussing late style. This repeated focus on canonic works in turn represents an attempt to stabilise Liszt's own position in the canon by association, overshadowing a wealth of further compositions equally worth exploring. Furthermore, the treatment of the material in each chapter relies too

¹⁶ R. Parker & C. Abbate, eds.: *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 1-2

heavily on previously exhausted methods, thereby neglecting to engage in much needed discussion of other aspects of the works themselves or the relationships between Liszt and the composers. Kregor skilfully consolidates the gamut of knowledge on these specific works, but, arguably, doesn't expand upon it as significantly as he aims to.

While 'quantitative fidelity' must be a contributing element to the discussion of Liszt's transcriptions, garnered through analysis, this procedure has been relied upon too heavily, at the expense of new, insightful discussion of deeper contextual dimensions. In chapter one of his book, Kregor describes how 'a more constructive way to discuss the nineteenth-century medium of transcription generally is to move away from rigid hierarchical degrees of reproductive success or failure in favour of drawing out contextual relationships between source and arrangement, composer and arranger, and public and performer'.¹⁷ Despite this pertinent appraisal, the second chapter, dealing with Liszt and Berlioz in Paris, overlooks major 'social issues in which a fundamental component of nineteenth-century culture like the piano transcription could be implicated',¹⁸ such as the French Revolution. The discussion instead focuses on the history of the *Symphonie fantastique*, with Kregor specifically highlighting an 'almost uninterrupted collaborative effort between the two artists'.¹⁹ This 'collaborative effort', however, is not fully demonstrated. As composers and friends living in Paris at the same time, there is a well documented exchange of letters covering all manner of things social, political, ideological etc., but, as Kregor himself points out, other than Liszt 'perhaps offering advice to Berlioz' on how to improve his *Symphonie* after the premiere, 'there is no evidence to suggest that Berlioz incorporated Liszt's recommendations'.²⁰ To say that Liszt 'cut his performing teeth' on the stage with the alterations he made to Berlioz's original score overlooks the fact that, in the four years between its completion and Liszt

¹⁷ J. Kregor, p. 11

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 2

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 44. Kregor mistakenly asserts that Goethe's *Faust* was a unifying factor in Liszt and Berlioz's early relationship: 'As Berlioz would recall years later in his *Mémoires* (chapter 31), the two spoke of Goethe's *Faust* and immediately realised that they shared the same artistic predispositions.' J. Kregor, p. 45. In fact, Berlioz recalls in his *Mémoires* that Liszt 'confessed he had not read' the work: "Je lui parlai du *Faust* de Goethe, qu'il m'avoua n'avoir pas lu..." - *I spoke to him about Goethe's Faust, which he confessed he had not read...* H. Berlioz: *Mémoires de Hector Berlioz comprenant ses voyages en Italie, en Allemagne, en Russie et en Angleterre, 1803 - 1865* (Paris, 1870), p. 139. [author's translation]

²⁰ J. Kregor, p. 52

embarking on his virtuoso career, he performed movements (II and IV) from *Symphonie fantastique* on only three occasions.²¹

The analytical elements in this chapter discuss the absorption of 'Berlioz's orchestral performance into his [Liszt's] own technique, creating a matrix that operated on several distinct hermeneutic levels'.²² This point is illustrated with an example from Liszt's score, b. 23 of the slow introduction to the first movement, highlighting the absence of a pedal marking: 'the pianist is forced to contort the right hand into uncomfortable positions in order to maintain the integrity of the three voices'.²³ Kregor continues, describing how in the next measure, when the winds enter with their main melody, the demands on the pianist recede: 'Thus the welcome arrival of a more subdued, settled theme at m. 24 is reflected in Liszt's arrangement by the analogous technical relief'.²⁴ It is impossible to use the absence of a pedal marking in any one of Liszt's scores as a hermeneutic focal point, as it is widely acknowledged (for instance by Kenneth Hamilton) that 'Liszt's indications for the sustaining pedal are not just scanty, but inconsistent'.²⁵ His transcription of the overture to *Tannhäuser* (1849) contains no pedal markings, but 'any fool can see you need pedal here'.²⁶ In Hamilton's words, 'when pedaling Liszt's music, we are best off ensuring that our ears, even more than our eyes, are open'.²⁷ Thus, if a passage appears awkward and uncomfortable when played without pedal, unless it is specifically marked to be absent, it should probably be played with the sustaining pedal.

This manner of reasoning is also employed in the fourth chapter, 'Monuments and Mythologies', which examines Liszt's transcriptions of the Beethoven symphonies in light of

²¹ 28 December 1834, Paris Salle du Conservatoire; 18 December 1836, Paris Salle du Conservatoire; 25 May 1838, Vienna Saal der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde

²² *Ibid.*, p. 46

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ K. Hamilton: *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York, 2008), p. 246

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 247

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 248

the 'Romantic mythology of Beethoven'. Kregor suggests that Liszt 'created them in part to exclude others from participating in and owning a share of the Beethoven legacy'.²⁸ A great deal of discussion of the 'myth of Beethoven' is presented as Kregor asserts that Liszt was trying to shape his own status as heir apparent to Beethoven's throne by performing his works, promoting Beethoven related causes, and, crucially, transcribing his symphonies.² The key to this assertion is the level of 'difficulty' Liszt's Beethoven symphony transcriptions present:

Liszt offers piano renditions with more ambitious aspirations than those of his predecessors: to capture the details of timbre and rhythm, harmony and melody, that raise Beethoven's orchestral works to the level of masterworks. In arranging them...Liszt hoped simultaneously to realize two goals that he had been advancing for the last decade: establishing Beethoven at the head of the pantheon and himself as the Beethovenian heir apparent.³⁰

The latter claim is derived from the last line of Liszt's foreword to these transcriptions: 'I shall be satisfied if I carry out the task of the intelligent engraver, the conscientious translator, who precisely grasps the spirit of a work and thereby contributes to the circulation of the masters and the sense of the beautiful'.³¹ Kregor's interpretation, however, seems to marginalise multiple other factors, including: the desire of the publishers, Breitkopf & Härtel, to have a complete set;³² the almost two decades that elapsed between the two periods Liszt spent working on the transcriptions; as well as the many other references Liszt makes to his desires to make Beethoven's works more widely available for their genius (not to mention the near incompleteness of the set, brought about by unassailable difficulties Liszt encountered whilst

²⁸ Ibid., p. 6

²⁹ More on Liszt's relationship with Beethoven can be found in Allan Keiler's article, 'Liszt and Beethoven: The Creation of a Personal Myth', *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 116-131

³⁰ J. Kregor, p. 132

³¹ F. Liszt, eds. Z. Farkas, G. Gémesi, I. Mezö, I. Sulyok: *Franz Liszt: Transcriptions IV* (Budapest, 1993), p. 1 [author's translation]

³² Letter from Breitkopf & Härtel to Liszt, 19 January 1863: '...we should like to express our desire to publish all [Beethoven] symphonies transcribed for piano two hands by you,...', O. von Hase: *Breitkopf und Härtel: Gedenkschrift und Arbeitsbericht* (Breitkopf & Härtel, 1968), fifth edition, Vol. II/1, p. 154 in F. Liszt, eds. Z. Farkas, G. Gémesi, I. Mezö, I. Sulyok, p. xiv

transcribing the fourth movement of the Ninth Symphony). A letter from Liszt to Breitkopf & Härtel, dated 28 August 1863, highlights Liszt's approach to transcribing the symphonies:

Whilst initiating myself further in the genius of Beethoven, I trust I have also made some little progress in the manner of adapting his inspirations to the piano, as far as this instrument admits of it; and I have tried not to neglect to take into account the relative facility of execution while maintaining an exact fidelity to the original.³³

As we can see, Liszt specifically draws attention to his efforts to make these transcriptions playable. He continues in this line of discussion: 'Such as this arrangement of Beethoven's symphonies is, the pupils of the first class in the conservatoires will be able to play them off fairly well on reading them at sight, on condition that to succeed better they must practice, which is always advisable anyway'.³⁴ Although at least nine other pianists of note also arranged Beethoven's symphonies,³⁵ Kregor insists that the sheer difficulty of Liszt's transcriptions 'place a premium on *inaccessibility*',³⁶ and that they were designed 'exclusively for only the most elite of virtuosos'.³⁷ An example is given from the fourth movement of the Fifth Symphony transcription: 'it is representative of the fiendish level of technical and analytical proficiency required to read Liszt's Beethoven symphony project...only an extraordinarily flexible left hand can hit the spacious C-major chords...Liszt's way of notating the broken chord in the main reading suggests that the top note should be struck by the second finger in order to maintain the ascending C-E-G melody that is paralleled in the right hand. The emphasis thus adds an extra element of precision to the execution'.³⁸ This representation of Liszt, elevated by the technical difficulties of his works, highlights a

³³ F. Liszt, ed. I. M. Lipsius (alias La Mara), trans. C. Bache: *Letters of Franz Liszt Vol. II: From Rome to the End* (London, 1894), p. 47

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Carl Czerny (complete for four-hand piano; 1827-1829), Johann Nepomuk Hummel (Nos. 1-7 for solo piano plus ad. lib. flute, violin, and cello; 1825-1835), Friedrich Kalkbrenner, Otto Dresel (complete for four-hand piano; c. 1850), Hugo Ulrich (complete for four-hand piano; c. 1850), Josef Gelinek, Friedrich Schneider, Anton Diabelli, Percy Goetschius

³⁶ J. Kregor, p. 137

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138

continued authorial reverence, one which Kregor himself refers to regarding previous Liszt scholarship.³⁹ This continuing trend, as well as devaluing the work, enables broad conclusions to be drawn purely on a superficial level, such as technical challenges which are in no way unique among Liszt's oeuvres.⁴⁰ In light of Kregor's analysis of technical difficulty in the Beethoven transcriptions, Liszt must also have been attempting to garner status by association with Berlioz as well, placing a premium on difficulty when transcribing the *Symphonie fantastique*. We know that Liszt performed movements from the *Symphonie* on only four occasions in public,⁴¹ but, having cited their sheer difficulty as a hermeneutic focus reflecting Liszt's prowess, Kregor then highlights that 'Liszt strove to make his arrangements playable...'.⁴² This contradiction is never clarified, despite being alluded to in the book's Introduction: '...while Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* and Beethoven's symphonies were offered to the public by Liszt as *partitions de piano* - thus ostensibly sharing many of the same ontological goals - the impulse behind their creation and...dissemination share little in common'.⁴³ Technical difficulty, or the level of virtuosity, is used in both cases to define their ontology. These 'residual signatures'⁴⁴ are used to qualify the context rather than the context taking precedence over the end product.

Whilst virtuosity is a prevalent theme in the discussion of Liszt's transcriptions, the term is used mainly as a substitution for describing technical difficulty, and rarely takes into account Liszt's own views on 'virtuosity' and the 'virtuoso'. At its heart, 'Liszt as Transcriber' still relies on 'quantitative fidelity' and the technical aspects of Liszt's transcription processes as a means of enlightenment. In her book 'Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century', Susan Bernstein engages in a discussion of the relationship between Wagner and Liszt and their respective philosophies of composition and performance, in light of their artistic definitions of the term

³⁹ Ibid., p. 121

⁴⁰ The crowning examples are surely the *Douze Grandes Études* S. 137 (1837) and the *Études d'exécution transcendente d'après Paganini* S. 140 (1838). Among others: *Symphonie fantastique* S. 470 (1833), *Grande valse di bravura* S. 209 [first version of S214/1] (1835), *Grand galop chromatique* S. 219 (1838), *Grande Fantaisie de bravoure sur La Clochette* S. 420 (1832-1834), *Apparitions* (1834)

⁴¹ J. Kregor, p. 60

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 3

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 2

'virtuoso'. Centred around Wagner's essay 'Der Virtuos und der Künstler' (1840), Bernstein is able to demonstrate that to Liszt, as a performer, the virtuosi stand 'side by side with, rather than beneath, the composer'.⁴⁵ Whilst Wagner acknowledges the composers' need for the virtuosi to make their works complete through performance, his position is that 'the virtuoso should neither add nor take away anything; he should be you yourselves'.⁴⁶ This can only be assured 'through a real appropriation of and assimilation to the composer's intention'.⁴⁷ Similarly to his position in Bernstein's book, Liszt becomes a pivotal artistic figure around whom the transcriptions may be contextualised in relation to the artists whose works he transcribed. As Charles Rosen wrote, 'at what point Liszt ceases to paraphrase and starts to compose is a question that often makes very little sense. ...Composition and paraphrase...were so closely interwoven that separation is impossible'.⁴⁸ Since 'that which music expresses...is essentially the proper theme of music, music expresses it much better than language is capable of doing',⁴⁹ instead of merely looking to the notated music for its meaning - which is communicated and disseminated in resounding - the works will be better placed in context by a deeper understanding of the reality of the composer. This reality is achieved through knowledge of the people, places, and events relevant to the composer at that time.

In this thesis, I will move away from discussing Liszt as a Teutonic embodiment of 'virtuoso', and investigate aspects of what Bartók called 'Liszt's many-sidedness'. For Bartók, 'Liszt did not start from any one point, nor fuse together in his own works several related things; he submitted himself to the influence of the most diverse, contradictory and almost irreconcilable elements'.⁵⁰ Victor Hugo and Giuseppe Verdi will provide the backdrop to an exploration of Liszt's relationship with Romantic literature, revolution, compositional identity, and his own developing musical interests. The convergence of these three figures through Liszt's

⁴⁵ S. Bernstein: *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century: Performing Music and Language in Heine, Liszt, and Baudelaire* (Stanford, 1998), p. 90

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ C. Rosen: *The Romantic Generation* (London, 1995), pp. 502-503

⁴⁹ S. Kierkegaard, trans. H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong: *Either/Or* (Princeton, 1987), pp.74-75 in S. Bernstein, p. 1

⁵⁰ B. Bartók, ed. B. Suchoff: *Essays* (London, 1976), p. 502 in S. Bernstein, p. 93

transcriptions will enable me to discuss some of the products of this important compositional form in a truly contextual manner. As Susan Bernstein highlights, 'the formula "Wagner and Liszt" is in fact a predicate modifying Wagner. It has become commonplace to link Liszt with Wagner in this way, to imply that Liszt is a mere continuation of what Wagner began, a sideshow to Wagner's center...'.⁵¹ This prosaic 'formula' has overshadowed the importance Liszt placed on the works of some other composers, such as Verdi. The transcriptions based on Verdi's operas are some of the finest in his entire output in the genre. On top of this, and coupled with Liszt's lifelong desire to write an Italian opera, his tenure at Weimar would have seen Verdi's operas produced as many times as Wagner's, had a performance of *Rigoletto* in 1854 not been cancelled.⁵² Because there is no evidence to show that Liszt and Verdi ever met or directly corresponded, acknowledgement of Liszt's Verdi-inspired works has tended to be in the manner of score analysis, as discussed above. The medium I will discuss between Liszt and Verdi is their music, or, more specifically, their musical aesthetics. Liszt's feelings about the state of post-Rossinian Italian opera were that the composition process had become 'a manufacturing operation where everything is known in advance and nothing is required but the actual time needed to put the notes on paper'.⁵³ How did this feed into his transcription works? I will comment on this in relation to the opera *Ernani*, which seems to have held a place of relative importance to Liszt - it spawned two transcriptions (one unpublished, 1847), and, under his baton in Weimar, *Ernani* was the first Italian opera to be produced, as well as being the only Italian opera to receive more than two performances.⁵⁴

As a play, the history of *Hernani* sheds a coarse light on the Romantic movement, and its première, igniting the fire in advance of the July Revolution, was an event Liszt was present for. By studying the interpersonal relationships between Liszt and Hugo at a time of political and social turmoil, and Liszt's aesthetic affinity for Verdi, I intend on placing his transcription

⁵¹ S. Bernstein, p. 82

⁵² Incidentally, the reason for its cancellation was down to what Liszt saw as the unacceptable quality of German translations of Verdi's opera. '...German translations of Verdi's operas are not worth a straw, and we are great purists at Weimar.' Letter from Liszt to Gaetano Belloni, 9 September 1854. F. Liszt, ed. I. M. Lipsius (alias La Mara), trans. C. Bache: *Letters of Franz Liszt Vol. I: From Paris to Rome* (London, 1894), p. 208

⁵³ B. James: *Liszt's 'Sardanapale': Its Creation, Sketches, and the Reception of Mid-Nineteenth Century Italian Opera Conventions* (dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009), p. 30

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18

activities in a more nuanced context. Charles Suttoni showed that a key factor in 'Liszt's mastery of the opera fantasy was the subjugation of virtuosity for its own sake to the nature of the dramatic material'.⁵⁵ An operatic transcription by Liszt possessed an innate sense of the overall drama, one that prevented the fantasy from 'degenerating into a potpourri or a succession of "hit" tunes'.⁵⁶ Rather than look to a score to find the work's truth, I hope to gain a better insight into the very way in which Liszt came to understand the dramatic nature of opera, and how this was translated into his transcription works.

⁵⁵ C. Suttoni: *Piano and Opera: A study of the Piano Fantasies Written on Opera Themes in the Romantic Era* (dissertation, New York University, 1973), p. 245

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 244

Chapter 1

In his doctoral dissertation on Liszt's incomplete opera *Sardanapale*, Bryan James highlights the importance of Italian opera as a compositional genre in the study of Liszt's music by engaging in a discussion of the composer's aesthetic response to this art form. James's Introduction reminds us that 'The genre of Italian opera held a prominent place in the musical thought, aesthetic perspectives, and compositional undertakings of Franz Liszt, particularly in the years prior to 1855'.¹ Tracing the developing 'musico-dramatic conventions' and structural models present in *primo ottocento* Italian *opera seria*, popularised by Rossini, James demonstrates how Liszt felt that the composition of Italian opera had become 'a manufacturing operation where everything is known in advance and nothing is required but the actual time needed to put the notes on paper'.² To Liszt, the reliance of composers on these musico-dramatic procedures resulted in 'a conventional manner for rendering all feeling and situations'.³ Following his years as a touring virtuoso, Liszt's attention was drawn to one composer of Italian opera in particular, whose developing compositional thought brought about significant changes in a genre at risk of becoming stale and manufactured. Alongside Vincenzo Bellini, no other composer of Italian opera devoted as much thought to the choosing of his plots as Giuseppe Verdi, as demonstrated in the following letter to Cesare de Sanctis:

I want subjects that are new, great, beautiful, varied, strong....and really strong, with new forms etc. etc. and at the same time suitable for music. If someone says 'I have done it like this, because that's how Romani, Cammarano etc. did it', then we no longer understand each other.⁴

As well as this focus on the subject of his operas, Verdi held a strong desire to see Italian opera released from the formal constraints that were merely 'rendering all feelings and

¹ B. James: *Liszt's 'Sardanapale': Its Creation, Sketches, and the Reception of Mid-Nineteenth Century Italian Opera Conventions* (dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009), p. 1

² *Ibid.*, p. 30

³ *Ibid.*, p. 31

⁴ Letter of 1 January 1853. G. Verdi, trans. C. Osborne: *Letters of Giuseppe Verdi* (London, 1971), p. 89

situations'. This desire was stated unequivocally by the composer in a letter to the librettist Salvatore Cammarano in 1851:

When I'm presented with some poetry that can be set to music, any form, any distribution is good, the more they are new and bizarre the happier I'll be with them. If in operas there were neither Cavatinas, nor duets, nor terzets, nor choruses, nor Finales, etc., and the whole opera were one single piece, I should find this more reasonable and proper.⁵

As the nineteenth century progressed opera in most countries gradually turned to freer, less predictable musical forms, but Roger Parker cautiously reminds us that Verdi is perhaps better seen as a 'conservative influence within this broad trend, especially in the context of his immediate predecessors in Italy'.⁶ Although there are numerous examples of Verdi radically altering or altogether ignoring traditional forms,⁷ it was a far more frequent occurrence for him to manipulate them from within, 'preserving their boundaries but expanding and condensing individual movements as the drama dictated'.⁸ This is a key point in Verdi's compositional process, and one which surely resonated with Liszt, leading him to publish seven transcriptions based on individual operas by Verdi between 1848 and 1883.⁹ Between Bryan James, Peter Dorgan, Barbara Crockett, and Jonathan Kregor, Charles Suttoni's appraisal of Liszt's operatic transcriptions neatly captures the consensus:

⁵ M. Chusid: *Verdi's "Il trovatore": The Quintessential Italian Melodrama* (New York, 2012), p. 15

⁶ R. Parker: *The New Grove Guide to Verdi and his Operas* (New York, 2007), p. 18

⁷ The introduction of Macbeth by means of an understated duettino, "Due vaticini", rather than a full-scale cavatina; the curious Act 1 duet between Rigoletto and Sparafucile, which is a kind of free conversation over an instrumental melody; the stretta-less grand finales of *Nabucco* Act 2, *I due Foscari* Act 2, *Attila* Act 1, *Luisa Miller* Act 1 and *Il trovatore* Act 2; the complete absence of a concertato finale in *I masnadieri* and *Rigoletto*. Other moments are less often mentioned: the duets of *La battaglia di Legnano* Act 1 and *Stiffelio* Act 3 follow the fluctuations of character confrontation so minutely that they are extremely difficult to parcel out into the traditional four "movements"; the Act 1 duet in *Alzira* moves from *tempo d'attacco* straight to cabaletta, a process repeated in the Act 1 finale of *Il trovatore*. Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *Salve Maria de Jerusalem* from *I Lombardi* (1848), *Rigoletto: paraphrase de concert*, *Miserere du trovatore*; *Ernani: paraphrase de concert* (1860), *Coro di festa e Marcia funebre* from *Don Carlos* (1868), *Aida, danza sacra e duetto final* (1879), *Réminiscences de Boccanegra* (1883)

A fantasy by Liszt embodies a dramatic point of view, and one can almost tell his reaction to an opera by examining his fantasy on it. The dramatic viewpoint provides a source of unity preventing the fantasy from degenerating into a potpourri or a succession of “hit” tunes.¹⁰

Rounding off this appraisal, Suttoni continues: ‘[Liszt’s] fantasies are at once both the presentation of the opera themes and his commentary on the drama of the opera’.¹¹ In his own discussion of the transcriptions of *primo ottocento* Italian opera by Liszt, James points to the composer’s tendency to ‘ignore the formal integrity, harmonic underpinning, or melodic structure of their models’.¹² Favouring broad ABA formats, Liszt would largely make use of several themes from an opera, selected from ‘widely separated sections of the work’, thus interfering with the structural integrity of the model. Only two of his piano transcriptions make use of material from a single scene and at the same time adhere to the essential structure of their models: the first part of *Réminiscences de Lucrezia Borgia* (composed 1840, revised 1848); and the *Paraphrase de concert* on Verdi’s *Ernani*, the first version dating from 1847¹³ and the revised version from 1859. As well as being the first transcription Liszt wrote on an opera by Verdi, the subject of *Ernani* would already have been familiar to the composer through its original format - Victor Hugo’s incendiary play that served as a precursor to the July Revolution in Paris.

Liszt and the Romantic

Whilst living in Paris, his home since December 1823, Liszt came into contact with some of the foremost artistic and literary figures of the time, one of whom in particular had a significant impact on the young composer. Victor Hugo was a driving force behind the Romantic movement, and his vision was laid bare in the twenty-five-thousand-word ‘Preface de Cromwell’ (1827), the manifesto adopted by Romantic ideologists for their cause.

¹⁰ C. Suttoni: *Piano and Opera: A Study of the Piano Fantasies Written on Opera Themes in the Romantic Era* (dissertation, New York University, 1974), p. 244

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² B. James, p. 19

¹³ Sketches for the first version of his *Ernani* transcription are dated 24 June 1847.

Let us then speak boldly. The time for it has come, and it would be strange if, in this age, liberty, like the light, should penetrate everywhere except to the one place where freedom is most natural, the domain of thought. Let us take the hammer to theories and poetic systems. Let us throw down the old plastering that conceals the façade of art. There are neither rules nor models; or, rather, there are no other rules than the general laws of nature, which soar above the whole field of art...¹⁴

Having ‘occupied the high ground in poetry, prose and literary theory’¹⁵ Hugo turned to the stage, and the Comédie-Française theatre was key to the impact of his statement; ‘French literature’ was synonymous with ‘Parisian literature’ and the focal point of Parisian literature was the Comédie-Française itself.¹⁶ His previous play, *Un Duel sous Richelieu* (1829, later retitled *Marion de Lorme*), had been thrown out by censors for insulting the King so, between 29 August and 24 September 1829, Hugo set to work on a new subject.¹⁷ *Hernani, ou l’Honneur Castillan* (1829) is an outlandish story centred around a Spanish bandit and disinherited noble, Hernani, whose affections for Doña Sol are reciprocated. However, she is being courted by two other men; one her aged guardian, the other a future Holy Roman Emperor. The play combines irony and passion, expressing comedy and tragedy in verse and, after being accepted by the censors expecting its failure on grounds of total indecency,¹⁸ on 25 February 1830 the Comédie-Française staged the première. Supported by his friends from the Petit Cénacle and young Romantic sympathisers, Liszt among them, Hugo orchestrated a major social uprising in the audience, one that led to what is now called ‘la bataille d’Hernani’. In truth, the ‘battle’ lasted from opening night until well beyond the final curtain months later. Violence was in the air and, soon, it would be on the streets: the July Revolution was approaching.

The impact of the revolution on Liszt's musical thought can not be overstated. 'Hearing the sound of gunfire, he [Liszt] rushed out of doors and witnessed hand-to-hand fighting in the

¹⁴ V. Hugo, ed. J. R. Effinger: *Preface de Cromwell and Hernani* (Chicago, 1900), p. 84

¹⁵ G. Robb: *Victor Hugo* (London, 1997), p. 135

¹⁶ V. Hugo, ed. J. R. Effinger, p. 84

¹⁷ A. W. Halsall: *Victor Hugo and the Romantic Drama* (Toronto, 1998), p. 73

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

cobbled streets of Montmartre. He joined the crowds shouting in support of General Lafayette...'.¹⁹ Such was Liszt's response to the events taking place around him that he began to sketch a 'Revolutionary Symphony'. Although it was never finished, the potency of its inspiration caused Liszt to revisit the work after the European uprisings in 1848-49, with the piece taking its final form as the symphonic poem *Héroïde funèbre* (1854). With this impact on Liszt in mind, it may be suggested that *Hernani* would also remain a potent source for the composer as an artistic embodiment of the Romantic cause in revolution.

At the start of this chapter the importance of Italian opera to Liszt's compositional development was discussed, as highlighted by Bryan James. A number of intermediary steps will now be explored, for they show that Verdi, specifically, had a place of importance in Liszt's transcription activities, over other *ottocento* composers who sought to develop Italian opera. This discussion will focus in particular on Saverio Mercadante, and the reasons for this are twofold: Bryan James's dissertation, as the most recent in-depth discussion of Liszt's interests in Italian opera, takes one of Mercadante's operas, *Le due illustri rivali*, as a model for the type of opera Liszt may have been keen to write himself (in terms of form, structure etc.), placing Mercadante as a composer of significant interest to Liszt and, therefore, anyone writing on this subject. The second reason is that Mercadante is recognised as having had a significant influence on Verdi. In a letter to Francesco Florimo, Mercadante's language regarding the reform of Italian opera is markedly similar to Verdi's own in the letter quoted above:

I have continued the revolution begun with 'Il giuramento' - varied the forms, abolished trivial cabalettas, exiled the crescendos; concision, less repetition, some novelty in the cadences; due regard paid to the dramatic side; the orchestration richer, without swamping the voices; long solos in the concerted numbers avoided, as they obliged the other parts to stand coldly by, to the harm of the dramatic action; not much big drum, and very little brass band.²⁰

¹⁹ A. Walker: *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years 1811-1847* (London, 1983), p. 144

²⁰ F. Walker: 'Mercadante and Verdi: II', *Music and Letters*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (January, 1953), p. 33

The selection, by Liszt, of one composer's works over the other's represents a conscious elevation of that composer. In order to take a balanced approach in appraising Liszt's interests in Verdi, his interests in Mercadante should also be considered.

In the years between 1819 and 1866 Saverio Mercadante produced sixty operas, and five times during his career he had four new works put on the stage in the course of one year.²¹ Despite economic and artistic *succès d'estime* during his time in Novara (1833-1840), Mercadante remained far less popular with audiences than Bellini and Donizetti, this being clearly reflected in Rossini's decision not to invite him to compose an opera for the Théâtre Italien in Paris until the spring of 1836 (Bellini and Donizetti had written works for the same theatre in 1835), even then asking for an *opera buffa* or *semiseria*.²² His compositional success peaked with the first of his reform operas, *Il giuramento* (1837), but whilst his reputation wasn't merely confined to Italy, Mercadante's international credentials never scaled the heights of Donizetti, Bellini, or Verdi. James's use of Mercadante's *Le due illustri rivali* (1838) is influenced by Liszt writing that Mercadante 'composes with wise deliberation and reviews his compositions carefully; thus his operas are, beyond question, the most correct and best orchestrated of all those I have heard in Italy'.²³ Despite preceding this quotation with a section devoted to Liszt's critical writing on Italian opera, the context of Liszt's opinion remains absent. Kenneth Hamilton's article in the *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 'Reminiscences of a scandal - reminiscences of La Scala: Liszt's fantasy on Mercadante's *Il giuramento*' sheds further light on the events surrounding this appraisal of Mercadante's works by Liszt.²⁴

On 27 May 1838, Liszt published an article in the *Revue et gazette musicale* of Paris entitled 'La Scala (March 1838)' as one of his 'lettres d'un bachelier ès musique'. This article, and a followup dated 28 March 1839, are mentioned by James but their content is not discussed. Hamilton sums up the main points of Liszt's comparison between La Scala and Paris succinctly: 'Liszt was appalled at the musical quality of many of the operas,

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ B. James, p. 45

²⁴ This article is in the most part an expansion of pp. 185-198 of the same author's *The Opera Fantasias and Transcriptions of Franz Liszt: A Critical Study* (dissertation, Balliol College, Oxford University, 1989)

deplored the standards of performance and despised the audience. Surveying Milanese musical life, he saw only a chauvinism that ignored the greatest achievements of foreign composers such as Beethoven and Weber, and resulted in the presentation of Mozart operas in bastardised versions revised by third-raters like Luigi Ricci'.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, Liszt's 'haughty and condescending' tone, reinforced by 'flashes of knowingly superior humour', made his position in Milan particularly difficult.²⁶ After a translation of the article appeared in the Milanese journal *La moda*, with annotations by the editor Francesco Lampato, Liszt attempted to smooth things over, claiming Lampato had been 'making a mountain out of a molehill' and asserting that 'he had no intention of offending anybody with his personal impressions of Milan'.²⁷ Needless to say, letters to the papers were not enough to restore Liszt in the eyes of the Milanese public; action was required. Liszt managed to arrange a charity concert, it having been thought for a long time that he was unable to arrange such an event, on 10 September 1838 at La Scala. One of the pieces performed that evening was 'an otherwise unknown "Grand Fantasy" called *Réminiscences de La Scala*', appropriately dubbed Liszt's 'musical apology to the Milanese' by Hamilton.²⁸ The conclusion of Hamilton's article shows that Liszt's *Réminiscences de La Scala* is, for the most part,²⁹ an operatic fantasy based on Mercadante's *Il giuramento*. This represents the single occasion on which a Mercadante opera was transcribed by Liszt and, coupled with the arrangements of six songs from the *Soirées Italiennes*, are the only times Liszt put his name to works by Mercadante. Despite this, Liszt can be quoted commenting favourably once again on the Italian composer, this time relating specifically to one of his operas:

I attended the early performance [sic] of Mercadante's new opera *Le due illustri rivali*. It is a skillful, conscientious score; a number of its ensembles are truly remarkable, and as a result it

²⁵ K. Hamilton: 'Reminiscences of a scandal - reminiscences of La Scala: Liszt's fantasy on Mercadante's "Il giuramento"', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Nov., 1993), p. 187

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 188

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 189

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190

²⁹ There is one melody in the fantasy that does not appear in the opera, the origins of which are currently undecided upon. Leslie Howard suggests that 'in an overt act of homage to La Scala, one presumes Liszt would have used material recently familiar there. However, since the scores of much of what was given at La Scala at the time in question have not been available for consultation, and those that have do not yield up the tune, the mystery remains for the moment, and need not detract from the innate joys of Liszt's fantasy.' L. Howard: 'Réminiscences de La Scala, S. 458', *Liszt: The complete music for solo piano, Vol. 54 - Liszt at the Opera VI* (London, 1999)

enjoyed complete success. There is no question that Mercadante's most recent works are the best conceived and composed of any operas in the current repertory.³⁰

This quotation is a key element in James's case for the importance of *Le due illustri rivali* as a potential model for Liszt's own ambitions in Italian opera, but it is in response to this quotation that Hamilton offers a sense of context. 'Of the great Italian opera composers, Rossini had written nothing for a decade, Bellini was dead and Donizetti was being drawn towards successes in Paris and Vienna'.³¹ Compounding these factors, Verdi's first opera (*Oberto*, 1839) had not yet been staged, and the works of Conti and the Ricci brothers are what had caused Liszt such despair in the first place.³² What becomes clear is that the only occasion on which Liszt based a work of his own on an opera by Mercadante was when he needed to save face in front of an audience he had offended, and the 'best conceived and composed...operas in the current repertory' were so for lack of any significant competition.

James approaches Liszt's admiration for Mercadante based on the opera composer's manifesto-like quotation from the letter to Francesco Florimo quoted above.³³ As Liszt never specified what he liked about Mercadante's operas, James determines that 'it is probably no coincidence that the very works that Liszt singled out...are among those in which Mercadante sought to depart from conventional formal practice. It may be that Liszt considered Mercadante a representative of the reform that he himself envisioned'.³⁴ Given the sheer number of operas composed, and the number of their performances,³⁵ it is clear that Liszt consciously neglected Mercadante's works in transcription. It could be reasoned that the Italian's compositions did not possess the necessary commercial viability publishers sought,³⁶ but many works by Liszt went unpublished; if he had held Mercadante

³⁰ B. James, p. 46

³¹ K. Hamilton, 'Reminiscences', p. 191

³² *Ibid.*, p. 192

³³ See p. 6

³⁴ B. James, p. 49

³⁵ See T. Kaufman: 'Mercadante and Verdi', *The Opera Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (June, 1997), p. 54

³⁶ This despite the composer having twenty-two of his operas published complete in vocal score, as well as numerous arias and 'principal numbers'. F. Walker (January, 1953), p. 33

in such esteem, particularly in relation to a genre we know was of key importance in Liszt's compositional development, he would surely have produced more than one transcription, even for himself. The use of *Le due illustri rivali* as a structural formula for *Sardanapale* appears to be less justifiable when all of the points above are considered. With Liszt's uncanny ability to seek out and promote the most progressive musicians of his time (Berlioz, Wagner etc.) it goes against logic to suggest that he would see Mercadante in this way, yet not transcribe a number of his multitude of compositions. This fact alone is in stark contrast to his transcription efforts on works by Berlioz, Wagner, and Verdi, as well as the outspoken public (and written) support he provided on behalf of the former two. Other than the two times James discusses, Liszt hardly lent his cause to that of Mercadante, even for posterity or the progress of Italian opera.

Clearly Mercadante was a formidable composer whose output was vast, but his popularity and its place on the international stage is, when compared to the progress and style of Verdi, less significant. In light of the historical context provided by virtue of his transcription focus, Liszt singled Verdi out as the composer of Italian opera he felt the most progressive. *Ernani*, the opera based on the play so closely linked to the July Revolution of which Liszt bore witness, bears the hallmarks of a work of significant interest to the composer. It was the only Italian opera to be produced by Liszt in Weimar more than once; it was the first Italian opera to be produced in Weimar under his baton; and, as a transcription, it is one of only two that makes use of material from a single scene whilst adhering to the essential structure of the model;³⁷ it dates from the time of Liszt's embarking on the composition of *Sardanapale*; and it was the first transcription Liszt based on an opera by Verdi.

³⁷ The other transcription is the first part of *Réminiscences de Lucrezia Borgia* (1840, revised 1848). B. James, p. 20

Chapter 2

While Liszt had been enamouring himself all over the musical centres of Europe, surpassing the achievements of all the previous piano virtuosi,¹ there was one other pianist of a similar age building a reputation equal to that of Liszt's own. Despite the incredible reception Sigismund Thalberg garnered around the globe, his music is almost entirely absent from modern performance repertoire and little scholarly research has been carried out into his life and works.² In this chapter I will explore possible reasons for Thalberg's diminished status in relation to his transcriptions, as it was through these compositions that the virtuosi established themselves during the early to mid-nineteenth century. By comparing and contrasting Thalberg and Liszt's approach to the same source material, it may go some way towards explaining why Thalberg's works have been all but forgotten, while Liszt's reputation prevails.³ In order to contextualise Thalberg's elevation to parity with Liszt, I will briefly highlight some biographical elements as well as his early musical training.

Born in 1812 in Pâquis, near Geneva, Thalberg was brought to Vienna at the age of ten by his father, Prince Dietrichstein, presumably to be tutored for a career in the diplomatic service.⁴ Music, however, 'seemed to be his first love', and between the ages of six and fourteen he received training in the rudiments of music from August Mittag (1795-1867),⁵ and in theory and composition from Simon Sechter (1788-1867).⁶ His primary piano teacher was Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837) and, in 1826, Thalberg travelled to London where he had piano lessons with Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870), who 'cherished

¹ A. Walker, ed.: *Franz Liszt: The Man and his Music* (London, 1976), p. 42

² I. Hominick: *Sigismund Thalberg (1812-1871), Forgotten Piano Virtuoso: His Career and Musical Contributions* (dissertation, Ohio State University, 1991), p. 1. See also E. D. Bomberger: 'The Thalberg Effect: Playing the Violin on the Piano', *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Summer, 1991), pp. 198-208; V. Mikol: 'The Influence of Sigismund Thalberg on American Musical Taste, 1830-1872', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 102, No. 5 (Philadelphia, 20 October 1958), pp. 464-468

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4

⁵ A respected professor at the Vienna Music Conservatory and first bassoonist with the Court Opera in Venice. *Ibid.*, p. 5

⁶ Viennese composer and organist who later taught Anton Bruckner (1824-1896). *Ibid.*, p. 6

Thalberg as one of his most gifted pupils'.⁷ Having not been overly exposed to the concert circuit from a young age by his father, as Mozart and Liszt had been, Thalberg steadily grew in esteem through performances at soirées in the homes of various members of the Viennese aristocracy. By 1828 he was regularly giving concerts in Vienna and had published his first three opuses. However, Thalberg's compositions weren't all well received, and his fantasy on Bellini's *Norma* Op. 12 faced negative reviews by Robert Schumann in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*,⁸ as well as in the Parisian paper *Le Pianiste*. This prompted a change in Thalberg's compositional style, in particular the omitting of counterpoint, and as a result several of his newer works, among them the *Deux Aires russes variés* Op. 17, gained enthusiastic praise even from Schumann.⁹

In November 1835 Thalberg arrived in Paris, performing at a private concert of the Austrian ambassador Count Rudolph Apponyi, and the 'Society of the Paris Conservatoire' concerts. Finally, in January 1836, he made his Parisian debut in a concert with Friedrich Kalkbrenner (1785-1849) and the violinist Henry Panofka (1807-1887).¹⁰ 'His quiet demeanour at the keyboard, his dazzling technique, and the unprecedented sonorities he drew from the instrument' inspired the following praise in *Le Ménestral* of 13 March 1836:¹¹

Moscheles, Kalkbrenner, Chopin, Liszt and Herz are and will always be for me great artists, but Thalberg is the creator of a new art which I do not know how to compare to anything that existed before him. ...Thalberg is not only the premier pianist of the world, he is also an extremely distinguished composer.¹²

As Paris became increasingly devoted to Thalberg's talents, reports of this new virtuoso reached Liszt in Geneva. In a letter to his mother Anna he wrote: 'Thalberg I should like to know. Those works of his that I have seen I find *so so*. The newspaper eulogies impress

⁷ Ibid., pp. 7 & 49

⁸ R. Schumann: *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Jg. 2, Bd. 2 (2 June, 1835), p. 178

⁹ R. Schumann: *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Jg. 3, Bd. 5 (26 August, 1836), p. 73

¹⁰ I. Hominick, p. 9

¹¹ F. Liszt, trans. C. Suttoni: *An Artist's Journey* (Chicago, 1989), p. 23

¹² Ibid.

me little'.¹³ His letters show more and more that his diminishing status in Paris occupied at least a portion of his attention: 'I played through an extremely mediocre fantasy by Thalberg on *La Straniera*; it has in addition, the fault of resembling, poorly, his previous ones. I definitely believe this man has nothing in his belly or his head. We shall see'.¹⁴ The clamour surrounding Thalberg did not relent, however, and Liszt's increasing separation from those to whom he was once so close manifests itself in a letter to Marie d'Agoult:

First of all, I have *no desire of any kind* to go to Paris at present. The two or three people that, at other times, I should perhaps have been quite glad to see again, have become *profoundly antipathetic* and *foreign* to me (don't think I am exaggerating, and above all take care not to believe that there is the slightest bitterness in my heart against... I can't finish...). Thalberg hasn't been there for the last ten days. Mme Montgolfier has told me nothing striking about him, and the new works of his that I have seen are decidedly mediocre.¹⁵

This nonchalance was eventually cast aside and Liszt made his way to Paris, infamously publishing a scathing review of Thalberg's music in the *Revue et Gazette Musicale*.¹⁶ Alan Walker describes this event dramatically, suggesting that Marie d'Agoult (who penned the review) having surrounded herself with literary admirers was keen to 'flex her muscles as a writer'.¹⁷ There is no doubt that the views expressed of Thalberg's Fantasy Op. 22 and Caprices Opp. 15 and 19 were Liszt's own, but the tone of the article prompted the acting editor of the *Gazette* to add a note with it, dissociating the publication from the harsh views being expressed.¹⁸ The rivalry between the two great pianists continued to be played out in the press, and one of Liszt's former admirers, François-Joseph Fétis, took up the case in defence of Thalberg:

¹³ Letter of March 1836. F. Liszt, ed. A. Williams: *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters* (Oxford, 1998), p. 52

¹⁴ Letter of 23 April 1836. *Ibid.*, p. 58

¹⁵ Letter of 28 April 1836. *Ibid.*, p. 61

¹⁶ Review appeared in 8 January 1837 edition of said publication. A. Walker, ed. (London, 1976), p. 56

¹⁷ A. Walker: *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years 1811-1847* (London, 1983), p. 236. In a letter to Marie d'Agoult of 13 February 1837, Liszt mentioned that Schlesinger, the editor of the *Gazette musicale*, had received a request from François-Joseph Fétis to write "a letter on the subject of my (or our) article on Thalberg". E. D. Bomberger: 'The Thalberg Effect: Playing the Violin on the Piano', *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Summer, 1991), p. 200

¹⁸ As acting editor it was presumably Berlioz who added this discretionary note. F. Liszt, trans. C. Suttoni, p. 24

You are a product of a school that has outlived itself and has nothing to look forward to. You are not the creator of a new school. *That man is Thalberg; this is the whole difference between you two.*¹⁹

The climax of this public battle took place on 31 March 1837 in the salon of Princess Cristina Belgiojoso-Trivulzio, who had invited the two virtuosi, along with other artists, to play in aid of Italian refugees. For the first time, Thalberg and Liszt would be playing on the same stage in the same concert. The critic Jules Janin recalled the event in the *Journal des Débats*: ‘Never was Liszt more controlled, more thoughtful, more energetic, more passionate; never has Thalberg played with greater verve and tenderness... And finally Liszt and Thalberg were both proclaimed victors by this glittering and intelligent assembly... Thus two victors and no vanquished’,²⁰ while Princess Cristina herself provides a concise judgement: ‘Thalberg is the best pianist in Paris but there is only one Liszt in the world!’²¹

Liszt continued to face comparison with Thalberg well into the 1840s and in that time loyalties changed and opinions were recast, as highlighted by Charles Suttoni: ‘Thalberg, as it turned out, also confounded the prophet in Fétis. Having forged his early innovations, he seemed quite content to repeat the same pianistic effects over and over again’.²² He goes on, ‘Four years after the altercation, Fétis, in an article prompted by the earlier *Transcendental Études*, modified his opinion. Less enthusiastic then about Thalberg, he praised Liszt warmly for his innovations in the “progress of musical art”’.²³ Progress, as we have already seen, was the driving force behind much of Liszt’s career in music. His ultimate desire to settle down and compose ‘serious’ works, whilst developing himself as a composer, was also to contribute to the “progress of musical art”. The discussion in Chapter 1 of the importance of arrangements and transcriptions to Liszt’s own musical

¹⁹ A. Walker (London, 1983), p. 236

²⁰ *Journal des Débats* (3 April, 1837) trans. in A. Walker (London, 1983), p. 240

²¹ I. Hominick, p. 70

²² F. Liszt, trans. C. Suttoni, p. 27

²³ *Ibid.*

development relates directly to this. After retiring from the concert stage in 1848 Liszt continued to produce numerous arrangements and transcriptions, this period actually yielding some of his best works in the genre. Knowing that Liszt's long-held ambition was to write an Italian opera, and having first transcribed a work by Verdi (whom we have seen he regarded as a progressive force in the genre) in 1847, it seems possible that Liszt had a greater scheme in mind when selecting and composing some of his 'Weimar period' operatic fantasies. Charles Suttoni wrote that 'Liszt's mastery of the opera fantasy was the subjugation of virtuosity for its own sake to the nature of the dramatic material'.²⁴ By honing his abilities in presenting the drama central to an opera on the piano, Liszt could turn his attention to the stage with at least a sense of the way other opera composers had successfully created drama.

In the remainder of this chapter I will compare the individual approaches taken by Liszt and Thalberg to the same opera in order to highlight what separates two of the greatest pianists and transcribers of the nineteenth-century. Verdi's *Rigoletto* provides the source material, and while Liszt's *Paraphrase de concert* remains firmly a part of concert repertoire today, Thalberg's *Souvenir* is rarely, if ever, found on a concert programme. Dated 1864, the *Souvenir pour le piano* by Thalberg was published thirteen years after the opera was composed and approximately nine years after Liszt had produced his own version.²⁵ In context with Thalberg's own life this work coincides with his official retirement from the concert stage, that being around December 1863 or January 1864 according to Hominick.²⁶ Below are the key centres of the *Souvenir* and the entries of each number.

Introduction	b. 1 - 12	D-flat major	
'Caro nome...'	b. 13 - 39	D-flat major	F major

²⁴ C. Suttoni: *Piano and Opera: A Study of the Piano Fantasies Written on Opera Themes in the Romantic Era* (dissertation, New York University, 1973), p. 245

²⁵ According to papyrological data relating to the manuscript, Liszt's *Rigoletto* was written on the same kind of manuscript paper as the *Miserere du Trovatore* and at the same time, between 1852 and 1856. It was probably given its final form in 1859, when Liszt worked out his *Ernani* (second version) and *Trovatore* fantasies for Hans von Bülow. F. Liszt, eds. A. Kaczmarczyk & I. Sulyok, trans. L. Dunbar: *Ferenc Liszt: Free Arrangements XI* (Budapest, 2004), p. xv

²⁶ I. Hominick, p. 18

Introduction	b. 1 - 12	D-flat major
‘Giovanna...’ Scena e Duetta	b. 40 - 106	B-flat major →
‘Zitti, zitti...’	b. 107 - 135	B-flat major
‘Bella figlia...’	b. 135 - 191 (end)	D-flat major

Thalberg’s arrangement encompasses a far broader selection from the original opera in the potpourri style, bringing together four numbers (three from Act I and one, the same Liszt uses, the quartet from Act III) to create a piece that represents an altogether greater journey through the narrative of the opera than Liszt’s *Paraphrase*. However, rather than compare like for like and only focus on the one number these transcriptions share, I will analyse Thalberg’s *Souvenir* in full, commenting on his treatment of each number. By doing so I aim to show that Liszt’s *Paraphrase*, while utilising only one number from the opera compared to Thalberg’s four, captures a much greater sense of the drama present in *Rigoletto*. This microcosm is achieved through harmonic and rhythmic alteration; striking yet specific performance directions/techniques; and even the way in which it is notated.

The *Souvenir* begins pensively with a statement of descending octaves in the bass, their rhythm and meter derived from the main theme of the first aria used, ‘Caro nome che il mio cor...’, sung by Gilda. As the theme and harmony develop in advance of Gilda’s entry, with orchestral flourishes added to the texture, a feature found throughout the opera is introduced: the octave leap to repeated notes (b. 6, Ex. 3.1).²⁷ Thalberg transfers vocal harmony to the piano whilst maintaining independence of line within the texture and, by the end of the first page (Ex. 3.1), he has already woven three motifs (the chromatic thirds, the descending line, and the octave leaps) together and hinted at the music to come.

Ex. 3.1 Verdi-Thalberg, *Rigoletto Souvenir pour le piano* (Paris, 1864), bb. 8 - 14

²⁷ The octave leap predominantly appears in the flutes and violins.

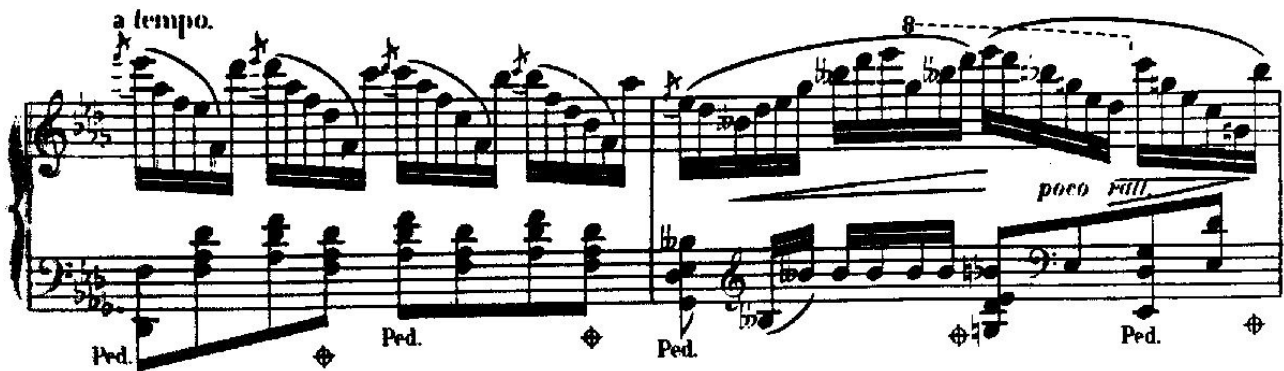
Before long, the left hand takes on scalic figurations to create a wash of harmony beneath the growing melody (Ex. 3.2). The added pace of sextuplets subtly provides ebb, pushing the aria to its first climax on the note of E-flat (b. 4, Ex. 3.2).

Ex. 3.2 Verdi-Thalberg, bb. 17 - 20

In Verdi's score the accompaniment to this passage remains sparse. The reason Thalberg introduces such a dramatic change is simple: whilst the sextuplets add momentum, the

piano is an instrument that, unlike the voice, is unable to build and swell in sound while resting on a single note. This is a passage of great colour easily manifested by a singer's voice but challenging for a piano to replicate, so Thalberg marks the new character of this passage by introducing a new technique. The florid nature of the left hand in Ex. 3.2 is then translated to the melody (Ex. 3.3). Inspired by Verdi's instrumental introduction to 'Caro nome...' the notes cascade down delicately but never interfere with the melodic line at the top. Thalberg even includes the orchestral flourish in the second violins we have become so accustomed to, the octave leap up to repeated notes (b. 2, Ex. 3.3).

Ex. 3.3 Verdi-Thalberg, bb. 21 - 22



At this point in the aria, Verdi's delicate texture makes way for the soloist to open up and show her abilities, tackling the same material now heavily ornamented, decorated and altered as one would expect in a theme and variations. Taking his cue from Verdi, Thalberg floods the piano with dense semiquaver figurations and cascading octaves, as well as cleverly syncopated inner voices, penetrating the right-hand accompaniment with melodic fragments (Ex. 3.4). The true homage paid to Verdi's score is the way in which Thalberg decorates this latter passage. He adopts the flourishes from the original score and creates his own challenging decorations based on them, thereby never straying too far from Verdi's hand.

Ex. 3.4 Verdi-Thalberg, bb. 37 - 44

As the intensity of the aria builds, it reaches its climax before melting away in a shower of demi-semiquavers, carrying us from *fortissimo* to *pianissimo* in a matter of three bars. As would be expected in potpourri writing, the medley of songs moves swiftly from one to another, juxtaposing their characters against one another. ‘Caro nome...’ comes to an end, making way for the pastoral-sounding ‘Giovanna, ho dei rimorsi’, a Scena e Duetta with the powerful tenor Duke. The texture of this *Allegretto* in the opera is a simple melody and accompaniment, and as such is transcribed directly by Thalberg, incorporating a lively new rhythm introduced in the woodwind accompaniment at the end of Gilda’s first phrase.

In the opera score this continues as Gilda and the Duke play the scene out, the Duke taking over and lifting the tempo to a sprightly *Allegro vivo*. In Thalberg’s transcription, however, this syncopated rhythm is employed in the right hand as an accompaniment to the Duke’s meandering *Andantino* aria ‘E il sol dell’anima’ (b. 2, Ex. 3.5). This ties together the two characters in this scene, Gilda with her lilting syncopation against the

strong purity of the Duke's melodic line. Thalberg demonstrates particular attention to detail when reproducing the tenor line in the *Andantino L'istesso movimento* section. At the indicated pitch in Verdi's score a tenor's voice would be rich and full bodied, so Thalberg writes the melody with an added third above, generating a fuller sound better equated to the texture of the tenor voice (b. 10, Ex. 3.5).

Ex. 3.5 Verdi-Thalberg, bb. 60 - 69

The image shows a musical score for piano, consisting of two systems of grand staves. The top system is marked 'And. L'istesso movimento. (♩=92) leggiero.' and 'marcato il canto.' The music is in a key with one flat (B-flat major or D minor) and a 4/4 time signature. The score features complex textures with multiple voices and chords, including pedal points indicated by 'Ped.' and a fermata symbol.

As the Duke's solo ends and the rhythm shifts to *staccato* semiquavers Gilda takes over, her melody played out at the top of the texture. Signalling the conclusion to this duet Thalberg brings the two melodic lines together, shifting the Duke's part up an octave to heighten the intensity of the climax whilst also enabling his melody to be interwoven with Gilda's more incidental part.

Without any pause between arias Thalberg prepares the next vignette from the opera in a shower of *pianissimo* demi-semiquavers, falling onto the quiet rumble of tremolo octaves, low in the bass register. 'Zitti, zitti, moviame a vendetta' is a delicate *allegro* addition to the *Souvenir* and concludes in under thirty bars. Within that space, however, Thalberg injects some liveliness into what has so far been a straightforward account of the opera. The

octave leap and chromatic thirds from the beginning of the piece are reintroduced as the aria develops, and the first signs of the virtuoso showman appear in the form of three-octave climbs in the right hand, à la Liszt's *La Campanella* from the *Grandes études de Paganini* (1851). 'Zitti, zitti' acts as the concluding number in what could be seen as preparation for the set piece of the fantasy as a whole, building up momentum ready for the start of 'Bella figlia dell'amore'. The quartet takes place at the height of the drama in Verdi's opera, just preceding the conclusion of the story and Gilda's death, and its themes are probably second in popularity only to 'La donna è mobile', explaining its position as the focal point in both composers' transcriptions.

In the original score Verdi again keeps the orchestration very sparse, allowing the singers to stamp their authority on this important scene. This approach is strictly adhered to by Thalberg and, out of the four numbers used in his transcription, the final quartet is certainly the most like a piano reduction. It is presented in the same key as the original, the only alteration being the tempo which is increased slightly, most likely to account for the decay of sound produced by the piano. Delicate orchestral touches that colour the original score, like the *pianissimo* chords in bb. 2 and 4 of Ex. 3.6, are easily transferred to the piano and Thalberg clearly allows Verdi's music to speak for itself.

In Liszt's *Paraphrase de concert* his intention for the fantasia to be heard on the concert stage is clear from the first bar. Marked *a capriccio*, Maddalena's melody is used as the seed from which an improvisatory E major 'Preludio' is spawned, Liszt showering the piano in arpeggios and demi-semiquaver figurations. As the preceding passage to 'Bella figlia' in Verdi's score is also in E major, Liszt takes his cue from there in preparing us for his fantasy. Eventually the original key of D-flat returns as well as Verdi's Andante tempo marking. The orchestral touches Thalberg takes directly from the score are replaced by Liszt with split chords, dividing the Duke's melody into smaller phrases, each ending *tenuto*. The scene retains its format from the original but with a slight harmonic twist, Liszt substituting B-double-flat for Verdi's A-flat. This chromatic alteration is emphasised by the E-flats that precede and follow the note, turning Verdi's perfect fifth into a colourful tritone and stamping Liszt's harmonic signature on the piece.

Ex. 3.6 Verdi-Thalberg, bb. 148 - 154

Andante. (♩ = 80)

M.D. M.G. M.D. M.G. M.G. M.G.

p *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

M.D. M.G. M.G.K. M.G.

pp *p* *p* *pp*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

Andante *ten.* *ten.*

cantando *pp* *pp*

* * * * *

sf *pp* *pp* *pp*

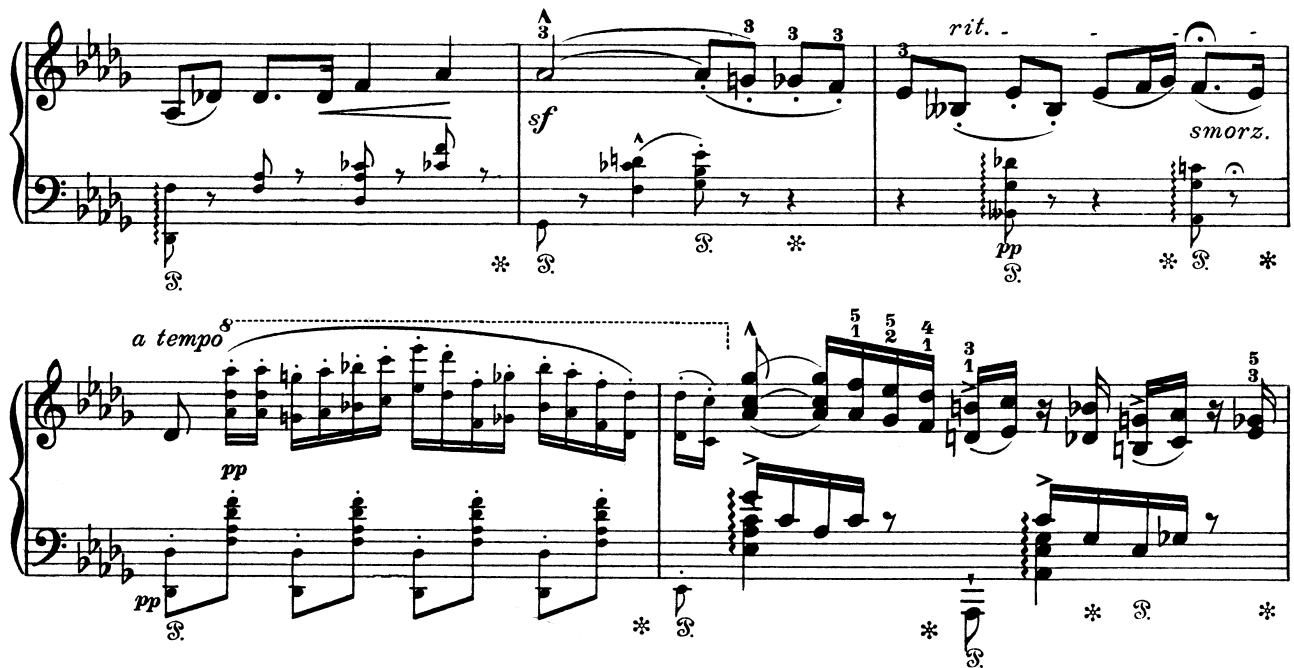
smorzando e rit. *a tempo*

* * * * *

Ex. 3.7 Verdi-Liszt *Rigoletto* (Leipzig, 1917), bb. 17 - 25

In order to direct our attention onto specific characters throughout the scene Liszt uses varying sizes of notation. This acts as a physical cue to the status of a character within the scene but also emphasises the touch and dynamic the performer should achieve in order

to correctly depict the drama (Ex. 3.8).²⁸ Thus, the Duke's attempts to seduce Maddalena are dryly rejected (b. 4, Ex. 3.8),²⁹ whilst Gilda's disillusionment is expressed in breathless descending cries (b. 5, Ex. 3.8).



Ex. 3.8 Verdi-Liszt *Rigoletto* (Leipzig, 1917), bb. 30 - 34

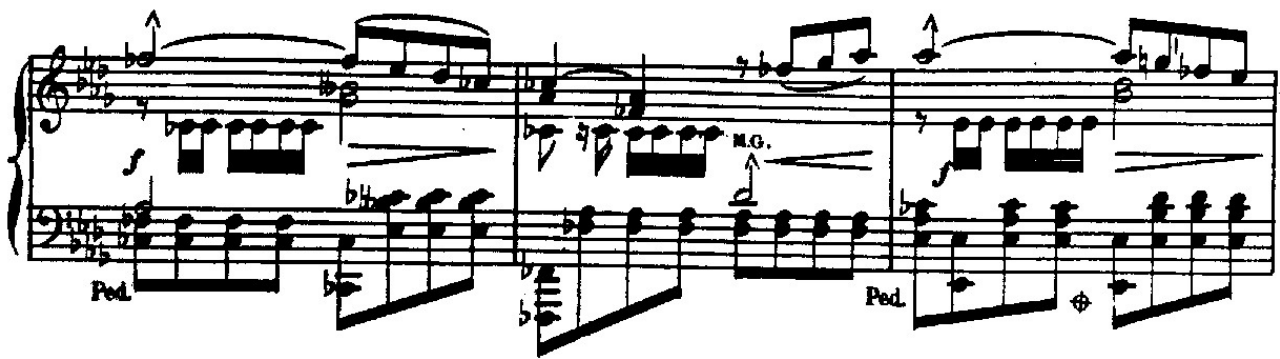
As *Rigoletto* begins to be heard, Liszt captures the effect of the increased number of voices by embellishing further. Dense *appassionato* triads declaim *Rigoletto*'s reprimands to Gilda, telling her to stop crying, whilst her powerful melody, doubled with octaves, thickens the texture and heightens the tension (Ex. 3.9).

²⁸ "You must play the first theme exactly the way a stupid tenor goes in for it, full of fervor." A. Göllerich, ed. W. Jerger, trans. R. L. Zimdars: *The Piano Masterclasses of Franz Liszt 1884-1886* (Indiana, 1996), p. 141

²⁹ '...throughout the rest of the piece, play the sixteenths in the right hand short and jesting, wanton, coquettish.' *Ibid.*



Ex. 3.9 Verdi-Liszt, bb. 39 - 40

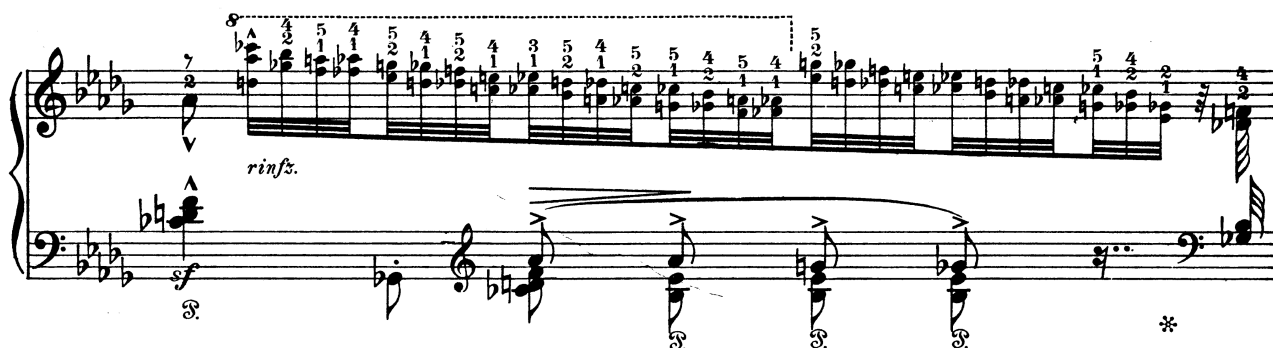


Ex. 3.10 Verdi-Thalberg, bb. 168 - 170

Thalberg's more literal transcription of the score keeps Rigoletto's statement simple (b. 1, Ex. 3.10) and the texture on the whole is more sparse. In Verdi's score, Maddalena's part in this is a statement of semiquavers on the note of C-flat, as reproduced by Thalberg (b. 2, Ex. 3.10). Because Rigoletto's part also remains static, however, Liszt successfully represents three distinct characters by identifying Maddalena's rebuttal to the Duke with her motif (b. 1, Ex. 3.9).

As the first climax of the scene is reached Liszt uses the entire breadth of the keyboard and sonorities at his disposal, encouraging intensity, emotion, and volume with the instruction *sempre più appassionato e crescendo*. Having raised the scene to *fff*, dazzling interlocking sixths descend chromatically to dissipate the heightened sonority.

The fantasy is allowed to flow free and the Duke and Maddalena's melodies are surrounded in a wash of demi-semiquaver runs up and down the piano, fulfilling the additional body of sound that Gilda and Rigoletto provide with incidental parts in Verdi's score. Through his notation Liszt brings the Duke and Maddalena to the forefront of the scene, writing their melodies in larger print than the florid runs representing Gilda and Rigoletto's contributions. Having presented the material Liszt continues to embellish it further, designing passages to represent the impact of the voices at any given moment. The descending right hand line in Ex. 3.12, marked *rinforzando*, invokes Gilda's powerful sustained B-flat over the top of the Duke's melody in Verdi's score.



Ex. 3.11 Verdi-Liszt, b. 50

Similarly to the first half of the fantasy Liszt begins the quartet proper with a restrained representation of the scene in the opera, picking out Gilda's line from the texture, again doubled with octaves. As Gilda comes to terms with the Duke's betrayal, her declamatory line 'infelice cor tradito, per angoscia non scoppiar' (O wretched heart betrayed, do not break for sorrow) is repeated, building towards the climax of her outpouring. In response to the growing tension, Liszt does away with Verdi's lilting accompaniment and replaces it with driving octaves in the left hand, resonating the piano under the quartet's chords at the top of the texture (Ex. 3.12).

Ex. 3.12 Verdi-Liszt, bb. 75 - 76

Ex. 3.13 Verdi-Thalberg, bb. 186 - 187

As we can see above (Ex. 3.13), Thalberg presents a muted climax by comparison, opting not to continue the octaves of Gilda's melody upwards as Liszt does. Instead he chooses to reflect specifically the pitch of Gilda's high C-flat as it is in Verdi's score, thereby significantly interfering with the overarching shape and direction of her line.

In Thalberg's *Souvenir* we have seen an approach to transcription which translates and in some ways refines for the instrument, but is still largely bound by Verdi's score. Liszt's *Paraphrase* on the other hand demonstrates a much greater consideration of the impact Verdi's music would have had in performance. As I will show in the next chapter, Liszt's engagement with a piece, and therefore his approach towards transcribing it, enabled him to incorporate the dramatic content of that work from two perspectives: the experience of the opera as it would be in performance, as well as the nature of the story on which the

opera was based. His response to the source material could produce quite differing results, and this is laid bare in two versions of *Ernani*, the second of which ‘can scarcely be described as a “second edition”’ and demonstrates ‘how Liszt was capable of writing what is virtually two compositions on the same theme without repeating either the compositional approach or even the figuration of the earlier version’.³⁰

*

On 30 April 1837 Liszt addressed a third (and final) article to George Sand, eventually published in the *Revue et Gazette Musicale* on 16 July 1837. Written almost exactly one month after the ‘showdown’ in Princess Belgiojoso’s salon, Liszt lays bare his own feelings on the ‘rivalry’ with Thalberg and, in doing so, casts the entire process in a far less dramatic light:

I want to talk about the matter that some people were pleased to call my “rivalry” with Thalberg. ...I was less sanguine, I admit, about Thalberg’s compositions when I heard them vaunted so absolutely and by the people who seemed to say that everything that had preceded them - Hummel, Moscheles, Kalkbrenner, Bertini, Chopin - was reduced to nothing by the simple fact of his arrival. Thus I was eager to see and acquaint myself with these pieces, so new and profound that they would reveal a genius to me.³¹

As he goes on to describe, Liszt was struck by the effect the ‘mediocre’ pieces he studied had produced everywhere, which led him to conclude that ‘the composer’s talent as a performer must be prodigious’.³²

³⁰ K. Hamilton: *The Opera Fantasias and Transcriptions of Franz Liszt: A Critical Study* (dissertation, Oxford University, Balliol College, 1989), p. 250

³¹ F. Liszt, trans. C. Suttoni, pp. 35-36

³² *Ibid.*, p. 36

I expressed it [his opinion] in the *Gazette musicale*, with no other intention than that of doing what I had done on many previous occasions; that is, to state my opinion, good or bad, about the piano pieces that I had taken the trouble to examine. ...I did think that I could say to no one's detriment that if this was the new school, I was not part of that new school; that if this was the direction Thalberg was taking, I had virtually no interest in travelling the same route; and finally that I did not believe his thinking contained a single germ of the future that others should strive to cultivate.³³

In a similar vein to the discussion of Liszt and Mercadante in the previous chapter, here again we see Liszt appraising the works of another composer and, crucially, judging its worth (in his eyes) as a contributor to the development of music. This being his ultimate goal, the challenge of a rival pianist and the direction his music was taking is yet another dimension in Liszt's own development as a composer. Since operatic transcription was the genre in which pianist-composers in Paris at that time were showcasing their abilities, we are reminded that a key factor in 'Liszt's mastery of the opera fantasy was the subjugation of virtuosity for its own sake to the nature of the dramatic material'.³⁴ Thalberg was 'a musician of exquisite taste, refinement, and expression, and... a performer who has carried certain effects of his own invention to the highest perfection in execution...'³⁵ but as the critic, "S", went on to describe in the London weekly *The Atlas* (21 May 1837):

...there is this deficiency in him which prolonged acquaintance only can detect - namely, a want of variety. Having heard a few of his pieces you have heard all - the same round of bravura passages, the same arpeggios, the same rapid octaves, the same double notes serve for every one of them... This constant reference to one sort of passage or effect ends in monotony, and the hearer becomes convinced that the sphere of Thalberg's excellence is far more contracted than he took it to be.³⁶

³³ Ibid., p. 37

³⁴ C. Suttoni, p. 245

³⁵ F. Liszt, trans. C. Suttoni, p. 36

³⁶ Ibid.

There is no questioning Thalberg's ability as a performer, his contributions specifically to the development of piano technique are the subject of an article by E. D. Bomberger,³⁷ but the most important distinction between the two virtuosos, as well as Liszt's overall contribution to the art of transcription, was Liszt's 'preserving the dramatic significance of the scene from which he had drawn his material'.³⁸

³⁷ E. D. Bomberger: 'The Thalberg Effect: Playing the Violin on the Piano', *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Summer, 1991), pp. 198-208

³⁸ B. Crockett: *Liszt's Opera Transcriptions for Piano* (dissertation, University of Illinois, 1968), p. 26

Chapter 3

By 1846 Liszt's years of touring had taken a huge toll on him physically, mentally, and personally. While dealing with his separation from the mother of his children, Marie d'Agoult, Liszt had one final tour to embark on before ending his performing career. As he stated with such candour in his letters, Liszt's career was the metaphorical steed to his Mazeppa from Lord Byron's poem.¹ Every concert generated countless additional demands on his time and money, and this was the fate Liszt felt so unable to escape from. His letters from this period are riddled with references to his state of health, spending weeks periodically bedridden with fever, jaundice, and exhaustion.² This, however, did not dampen his desire to embark on a tour to Asia Minor and Constantinople, places he had dreamed of seeing and actually planned on visiting ten years previously with the now estranged Marie d'Agoult.³ The schedule for this tour was incredibly punishing, the daytime consumed by concerts, speeches, balls, and banquets, while the nights were used for travelling to the next town. In total, between March 1846 and September 1847, when Liszt played his final concert as a touring virtuoso, he performed approximately seventy times, visiting thirty-seven towns across the continent.

Much of 1846 was spent in his native Hungary where, as well as giving many concerts for charities and educational causes, he received important civic honours. These months spent in his homeland, and the honours he received, were of great importance not only to Liszt but also to his compatriots; Hungary was preparing itself for national independence and a bloody revolution in 1848. As has been highlighted already, Liszt was at the premiere of Hugo's *Hernani* in 1830 and saw first hand the struggle of a nation against its ruling powers; now, his homeland was preparing for a similar battle. Coupled with what has already been demonstrated as Liszt's admiration for Verdi's works, it is possible that these events, by association, fed into any greater affinity Liszt felt for the opera 'Ernani'.

¹ '...I have been leading a life, following a trade, which would kill several horses, but it is impossible for me to unharness myself at present.' Letter of 2 April 1846. F. Liszt, ed. A. Williams: *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters* (Oxford, 1998), p. 233

² *Ibid.*, pp. 216, 251, 252

³ A. Walker: *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years 1811-1847* (London, 1983), p. 428

'Ernani' premiered at the Teatro la Fenice in Venice on 9 March 1844, and despite the singers not performing up to the highest standard, Verdi, thankfully, did not have to make good on his threat of 'blowing his brains out'.⁴ Verdi himself highlights the success it enjoyed on the opening night, with 'three curtain calls after the first act, one after the second, three after the third, and three or four at the end of the opera'.⁵ In Chapter 2 the way in which Verdi contributed to the progression of Italian opera was hinted at, but Roger Parker describes more fully how "'Ernani'" represented an important change of direction in Verdi's early career. "Nabucco" and "I Lombardi" had both been written for La Scala which, as one of the largest stages in Italy, was well suited to the grandiose choral effects of those works'.⁶ Writing for the more intimate atmosphere of La Fenice, Verdi created an opera that instead concentrated on personal conflict, exercising great control over the sequence of actions necessary to bring the characters into intense confrontation. In respect of his 'expanding and condensing of individual movements as the drama dictated',⁷ 'the third act of "Ernani" sets an imposing standard of coherence, one that is rarely equalled until the operas of the early 1850s'.⁸

In her doctoral dissertation on Liszt's *Tasso* sketchbook, Rena Mueller suggests two possible locations at which Liszt may have seen 'Ernani' for the first time: the first of these is Madrid.⁹ Liszt arrived there on 22 October 1844, gave four concerts at the Teatro del Circo,¹⁰ and left en route to Cordoba on 4 December. The second location is in Lisbon, where Liszt stayed for six weeks from 15 January until 25 February 1845.¹¹ 'Ernani' had its Portuguese premiere at the Teatro de Sao Carlos in Lisbon on 1 January 1845, the same theatre in which Liszt enjoyed some of his own concert triumphs during his stay. According to the opera house chronicle, published in 1883, however, 'Ernani' was replaced

⁴ M. J. Phillips-Matz: *Verdi: A Biography* (Oxford, 1993), p. 157

⁵ Letter of 10 March 1844. G. Verdi, trans. C. Osborne: *Letters of Giuseppe Verdi* (London, 1971), p. 19

⁶ R. Parker, ed. S. Sadie: *Verdi, Giuseppe (Fortunino Francesco)*, *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (Oxford Music Online, accessed June 2013)

⁷ Chapter 2, p. 2

⁸ R. Parker, ed. S. Sadie

⁹ R. C. Mueller: *Liszt's Tasso Sketchbook: Studies in Sources and Revisions* (dissertation, New York University, 1986), p. 309

¹⁰ Concert dates: 31 October; 2, 5, and 9 November. A. Walker, p. 409

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 410-412

by Donizetti's 'Lucrezia Borgia' on 15 January,¹² the same day Liszt arrived and, we know, attended this performance.¹³ We also know that on 15 February he played at a benefit concert for the tenor Enrico Tamberlik, at which Tamberlik sang arias from 'Ernani' to Liszt's accompaniment, but Liszt himself ends any speculation in a letter to Princess Belgiojoso dated 6 January 1845:

Berlioz tells us of a great composer, Félicien David. Have you heard his *Désert*? The poetical programme does not seem very varied! In Madrid we had two operas by Verdi, *Nabucco* and *Ernani*, and after my departure they put on *I Lombardi*. It is splendid, ever splendid and never better.¹⁴

While this letter helps us place the location, and roughly the date, at which Liszt first heard 'Ernani', it tells us nothing more about his response to the relatively new opera. For Liszt to have heard 'Ernani' in Madrid, it would have either been at the very end of October or during November 1844, therefore two months had elapsed between him seeing the opera and writing this letter. Taking this into account, it seems possible that there remain unpublished letters from this period in which he does offer his views; in lieu of these sources, Liszt's attention to 'Ernani' as the inspiration behind two transcriptions that almost uniquely adhere to the essential structure of the model,¹⁵ as well as the first Italian opera to be staged in Weimar under his baton, will suffice.

Although he encountered 'Ernani' during the Iberian period of his travels, there is no evidence to suggest Liszt drafted any piano work based on the material at this time. The initial sketches of the first transcription of *Ernani* were made some years later during the period spent in Constantinople, 8 June - 13 July 1847, the autograph being dated 24 June.¹⁶ It is impossible to say with any certainty what prompted Liszt to begin work on the

¹² F. d. F. Benevides: *Real Theatro de S. Carlos de Lisboa* (Lisbon, 1883), p. 209

¹³ A. Walker, p. 410

¹⁴ Letter of 6 January 1845. F. Liszt, ed. A Williams, p. 219

¹⁵ B. James: *Liszt's 'Sardanapale': Its Creation, Sketches, and the Reception of Mid-Nineteenth Century Italian Opera Conventions* (dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009), p. 20

¹⁶ R. C. Mueller, p. 316

sketches at this time: Adrienne Kaczmarczyk and Imre Sulyok suggest it was ‘probably [for] a concert to be given before the Sultan, Abdul-Medjid Khan, a great lover of Italian opera, or before his household’,¹⁷ a theory shared by Kenneth Hamilton.¹⁸

In the previous chapter I was able to demonstrate how Liszt’s transcription of Verdi’s *Rigoletto* succeeded in capturing a greater sense of the drama than Thalberg’s *Rigoletto*-inspired *Souvenir*. In the remainder of this chapter I will compare and contrast the two transcriptions Liszt based on ‘Ernani’. By doing so, I aim to show how the stark contrast in technique and approach produced utterly differing results, which in turn reflect the two consecutive periods of Liszt’s life in which they were composed. The earlier version, with hints of Thalbergian bravura, is less effective in reproducing ‘Ernani’s’ inherent drama, while the second version shows a much greater consideration of the dramatic themes of the opera, as well as more inventive, and effective, treatment of the music.

The earlier transcription is based on the finale from Act I, starting from Don Carlo’s ‘vedi come il buon vegliardo’, and the finale from Act III, starting from ‘O sommo Carlo’. In line with what we have already established about Verdi’s approach to this opera, taking into account the theatre for which it was written and the overall architecture of each act, the choice of numbers is impeccable. The second, and significant, observation we can make is on the state in which the first transcription was left by Liszt. Although a fair copy was made by Gaetano Belloni¹⁹ there are no original fingerings given, no original phrase markings, no original pedalling, and no original dynamics. The only bar that contains Liszt’s own performance directions is b. 46. As Kenneth Hamilton suggests, it seems plausible that at one time Liszt may have intended on publishing the first version of *Ernani*, since it is unlikely he would commission a fair copy of a sketch.²⁰

¹⁷ F. Liszt, eds. A. Kaczmarczyk & I. Sulyok, trans. L. Dunbar: *Ferenc Liszt: Free Arrangements XI* (Budapest, 2004), p. XIII

¹⁸ ‘One cannot be sure that Liszt played the fantasia there, for information on the programmes of his concerts is scanty, but it is surely very likely.’ K. Hamilton: *The Opera Fantasias and Transcriptions of Franz Liszt: A Critical Study* (dissertation, Oxford University, Balliol College, 1989), p. 242

¹⁹ Gaetano Belloni entered Liszt’s entourage in February 1841 and became the ‘chief architect of Liszt’s performing career’. Acting as manager, secretary and ‘general factotum’, Liszt frequently had Belloni make neat copies of his compositions. A. Walker, p. 365

²⁰ K. Hamilton, p. 242

Written in the same key as the original, the *Première paraphrase* begins *sotto voce*, with Don Carlo's 'vedi...' establishing an important rhythmic motif straight away (b. 1, Ex. 4.1). As this dotted rhythm is taken up by the chorus (b. 2, Ex. 4.1), Liszt colours their march-like statements with the left hand drifting over sextuplet figurations and trills in the lower register. Distinguishing between musical importance and facilitating syllables in the libretto, Liszt resolves these opening phrases on a single chord, so as not to clutter Don Carlo's solemn statement on its return (b. 3, Ex. 4.1 & b. 2, Ex. 4.2).

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano accompaniment. The first system is marked 'Adagio' and 'sotto voce'. The right hand has a whole rest, while the left hand plays a dotted quarter note followed by eighth notes, then a sextuplet and trills. The second system shows the right hand with a triplet of chords and the left hand with a dotted quarter note followed by eighth notes, then a sextuplet and trills.

Ex. 4.1 Verdi-Liszt, *Ernani* (1st version, Editio Musica Budapest, 2004), bb. 1-4

sottovoce
 Gio. Ben di Sil - va mo - stra il vol - to l' a - spra guer - ra che ha nel
sottovoce
 Ric. Piu - fe - ro - ce a Sil - va in pet - to de' ge - lo - si av - vam - pa il
 D.C. - gliar - do or del cor l'ira de - po - ne;
sottovoce
 Sil. Ah! dagl'oc - chi un vel mi ca - de! cre - do ap - pe - na a' sen - si
sottovoce
 Ja. Ben di Sil - va mo - stra il vol - to l' a - spra guer - ra che ha nel
sottovoce
 Ben di Sil - va mo - stra il vol - to l' a - spra guer - ra che ha nel
 Ben di Sil - va mo - stra il vol - to l' a - spra guer - ra che ha nel
 Ben di Sil - va mo - stra il vol - to l' a - spra guer - ra che ha nel

Ex. 4.2 Verdi, *Ernani* (New York, Edwin F. Kalmus, No date), p. 184

Other than these minor changes Liszt shows the sort of restraint from over-indulgent virtuosity Charles Suttoni was referring to above,²¹ and transcribes the score as close to the original as could be. In b. 9 he continues to make slight alterations of his own, adding a chromatic line under Don Carlo's solo: this ascending scale ties together the *tutti* scale from the preceding, and following, bars with Don Carlo's motif from the start of the piece. As the *tutti* scale resolves once again, Liszt introduces Elvira with a flowing cadenza inserted seamlessly in place of her sustained G. To the words 'del suo Re, in presenza del suo Re' he again maintains the body of the chorus in the right hand with simple first inversion triads, now supported by the trill and sextuplet figurations introduced at the start in the left hand. Rounding the phrase off, Liszt adds a bubbling left hand cadenza in the lower register that delays the end of the aria by a fraction. With the music fairly sparse already, Verdi marks this passage *allargando*: Liszt, having already established these left hand figurations, uses the cadenza to achieve *allargando* without the phrase seemingly coming to a halt.

²¹ C. Suttoni: *Piano and Opera: A Study of the Piano Fantasies Written on Opera Themes in the Romantic Era* (dissertation, New York University, 1973), p. 245

The next passage marks the first significant departure from the original score. Verdi scores a simple, straight semiquaver accompaniment, coming off the tonic on the beat (Ex. 4.3). Liszt maintains the momentum but with fewer notes, instead writing the left hand in triplets, driven by a small syncopation (Ex. 4.4). Over this, the right hand continues to deliver Ernani's melody, harmonised accordingly with Elvira's and, eventually, Don Silva's parts. Liszt's ingenuity around this passage presents a fascinating solution to operatic scoring. Rather than clutter the piano with notes constantly repeating, he preserves a delicate intimacy with the vocal line, encouraged by a left hand part that disappears into the background. This passage in particular serves as a fine example of Liszt's mastery of *bel canto* writing.

Ex. 4.3 shows a musical score for Verdi's *Ernani*. The top staff is a vocal line with the lyrics: "tua per sem - pre o que - sto fer - ro". The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment consisting of a steady stream of semiquaver notes in the right hand and a series of triplets in the left hand.

Ex. 4.3 Verdi *Ernani*: *Partition pour piano seul* (Paris, Léon Escudier, No Date) p. 37

Ex. 4.4 shows a musical score for Verdi-Liszt (1st version), measures 14-17. The score is for piano solo. The right hand features a melody with a long slur over measures 14-17. The left hand features a series of triplets in measures 14-15, followed by a trill in measure 16, and another trill in measure 17. The dynamic marking *p* is present in measure 14. The score is numbered 14, 16, and 17. The publisher's number Z. 12 400 is at the bottom.

Ex. 4.4 Verdi-Liszt (1st version), bb. 14 - 17

At b. 17 Liszt once again alters the texture slightly, introducing the trills in the left hand that have featured so highly. Picking out Ernani and Elvira's melodies as the focal point, the right hand is divided between the melody at the top of the texture and the pulsing violin triplets in the middle. In Verdi's score, Don Carlo interjects with a simple statement built on the root of the harmony at this point. Rather than break up the flow of the passage and distract from the more important melody by attempting to force another character's line into the texture, Liszt instead creates the effect of more voices with trills. In this way, the bass texture becomes a feature but, as in the opera, one that merely adds to the overall timbre without overwhelming it. The passage draws to a close and returns to the pattern of strings in the bass.

For the first time since the entrance of Don Carlo, the scoring becomes much fuller: brass, woodwind, strings, chorus, and soloists are all involved (Ex. 4.6). The different sections can be divided simply into those of melody and accompaniment (the clarinets doubling Ernani and Elvira while horns double the strings), but as Liszt has already established his tool for a richer texture as a motif to be developed, it is that which takes place of heavier chords. The left hand takes the melody in the middle register, while the right hand plays soaring passages *quasi cadenza* (Ex. 4.5).

Z. 12 400

Ex. 4.5 Verdi-Liszt (1st version), bb. 27 - 28

Fl.

Ott.

Ob.

Cl.
Sib

Fg.

Mib
Cor.
Sib

Trb.
Mib

Trbn.

Cmba.

Tp.

El.
_ fan - ni la - co - stan - za di mia fe', si, la - co - stan - za di mia

Gio.
la pre - sen - za del Re, la pre - sen - za del suo

Er.
- ran - no, ser - ba a Er - na - ni, ser - ba a Er - na - ni, ser - ba a Er - na - ni la tua

Ric.
- gion la pre - sen - za la pre - sen - za del suo

D. C.
- gio - ne la pre - sen - za del su - o - Re, del su - o

Sil.
- i la pre - sen - za del mi - o

Ja.
in pre - sen - za del Re, del su - o

Sopr.
la pre - sen - za del su - o

gion la pre - sen - za del su - o

gion la pre - sen - za del su - o

Vni

Vlo

Vc.
Cb.

Ex. 4.6 Verdi, p. 190

This effect resonates through the piano before settling on a trill in the upper register (Ex. 4.5). The cavity between the trill, the melody, and the bass note spans five octaves, a gap that is bridged by our ears thanks to the wash of notes leading up to it. Building towards the climax of this passage, Liszt continues his development of approach alongside Verdi's score. While the melody is carefully picked out, Liszt bolsters the timbre with a combination of trills, syncopation, and cascades of notes, each texture introduced in sequence so as not to stifle one another (Ex. 4.7).

The image displays three systems of musical notation for piano. The first system, labeled '29' and '131', shows a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a bass line. The second system, labeled '(29)', shows a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a bass line. The third system, labeled '(30)', shows a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a bass line. The score includes various musical notations such as trills, syncopation, and cascades of notes.

Ex. 4.7 Verdi-Liszt (1st version), bb. 29 - 31

Responding to another change in texture, Liszt introduces a straight semiquaver accompaniment at b. 32, acknowledging Don Carlo as the main vocal line, supported by a chorus of staccato notes ascending through the texture. With the scene drawing to a close, Verdi resolves the first major climax with a new texture. At the height of the five main characters all singing, the orchestra joins in and all resolve in unison. To achieve this Liszt can finally employ one of his most effective techniques - tremolo. Prepared by interlocking chords rising up the piano, the right hand rings out over the texture into resolution. As this is the climax to Act I, Liszt employs every technique at his disposal to finish: interlocking chords (their desired effect derived from the earlier trills), overlapping arpeggiated figures, and striking chords. The final chord is delayed by a florid, fantasia-inspired right hand passage. A pensive coda winds down the rhythmic theme from this finale and disperses into nothing, ready for the solemn 'O sommo Carlo'.

Before continuing the analysis some other differences ought to be highlighted, in particular those from the original score, which will dictate how the third-act portions of the transcriptions will be analysed. The second transcription, dealing solely with the finale of Act III, is also very much in the bravura style, but whilst both versions utilise the two main themes (Ex. 4.8 & 4.9), their treatment is highly contrasting.

The image shows a musical score for Verdi's *Don Carlo*. It consists of three staves:

- Staff 1 (Piano):** Labeled 'A.' and 'Adagio'. The right hand has a melodic line with triplets and a dynamic marking of *p*. The left hand has a steady accompaniment of eighth notes.
- Staff 2 (Vocal):** Labeled 'DON CARLO'. It includes the instruction '(fissando la tomba di Carlo Magno)'. The vocal line begins with the lyrics 'Oh som - mo Car - lo, più del tuo no - me le tue vir.' There are accents (^) over the notes for 'lo', 'me', and 'vir'.
- Staff 3 (Cello):** Labeled 'Vc.' and 'Adagio PIZZ.'. It features a pizzicato accompaniment of eighth notes with a dynamic marking of *p*.

Ex. 4.8 Verdi, Don Carlo's first theme, p. 428

Ex. 4.9 Verdi, Don Carlo's second theme, p. 435

The remarkable difference in Liszt's handling of this scene between the two transcriptions will undoubtedly be what Hamilton was referring to when he observed that *Ernani* demonstrates 'how Liszt was capable of writing what is virtually two compositions on the same theme without repeating either the compositional approach or even the figuration of the earlier version'.²²

The first thing to note at this point about the *Première paraphrase* is that the key is different. The second transcription preserves the original key of F minor, while the first shifts to A-flat minor. Following on from the finale of Act I ending in E-flat, the shift to A-flat minor seems far more natural in the scheme of this transcription than up a tone to F, however the new key presents challenges centred mainly around its obscurity. Few pieces are written with A-flat minor as their key centre and, if that particular tonality is desired, more often than not they are notated in G-sharp minor. One can only speculate at the reason Liszt chose to sacrifice ease of notation for the seven-flat key *Ernani* is written in. He instantly establishes the new key, however, and forgoes the introduction, beginning straight away with Don Carlo invoking the memory of Charlemagne. The texture is sparse and closely resembles Verdi's score, a single note for the melody, enveloped in clockwork sextuplets. The second transcription handles the beginning very differently: it begins boldly with tonic octaves to the rhythm of Don Carlo's words, followed by an augmentation of the mournful triplet harp figurations, now stated as 7th chords rising up the keyboard.

²² K. Hamilton, p. 250

This repeats, altering the chords, before resolving into the triplets, instead placed in the bass register and with broken chords added (Ex. 4.10). As in the *Rigoletto* paraphrase, Liszt notates the accompanying parts smaller than the main melody, thus making the distinction between parts clear to both performer and, subsequently, listener.

The image shows a musical score for Ex. 4.10, Verdi-Liszt, *Ernani* (2nd version). It consists of two staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in the upper register and includes the instruction "il canto sostenuto e marcato". It features dynamics such as "f" and "ten." (tenuto). The piano accompaniment is in the lower register and includes dynamics like "sf", "rit.", "p", and "ma ben marcato". It features a main melody with triplets and broken chords. There are also markings for "sempre staccato" and "p". The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 4.10 Verdi-Liszt, *Ernani* (2nd version, Editio Musica Budapest, 2004), bb. 4 - 7

In terms of the original score the first transcription is truer to the notes on paper, and this reflects a significant difference between the two transcriptions Liszt based on *Ernani*. 'O sommo Carlo' comes at a turning point in the story when Don Carlo, having caught his conspirators (including Ernani) plotting his death, calls on the memory of the great emperor Charlemagne for guidance. As mentioned earlier the first version presents 'O sommo Carlo' simply, the sextuplet figurations only being slightly developed into rising two-note chords, before arriving at the end of the phrase, 'dell tue gesta imitator' (b. 1, Ex. 4.11). From there, strings replace the harp with stationary, staccato triplet chords, and Liszt follows suit. Looking at the same point in the second transcription, he instead chooses harp-like broken chords, and these remain until the *crescendo* before the chorus is introduced (bb. 1 - 4, Ex. 4.12). The complete change in how this scene is presented is fully justified, with the focus in Liszt's second version more acutely placed on Don Carlo. The smaller notation of all accompanying parts as well as the ethereal harp-like strums that surround the melody invoke the intimacy of his spiritual apostrophising. This sense of intimacy isn't as palpable in the first version due to the extra activity of the sextuplets and chords, their placement in the upper register crowding the all important melody.

61

pp *declamato*

64

rit.

Z. 12 400

Ex. 4.11 Verdi-Liszt (1st version), bb. 61 - 65

15

pp *p sotto voce* *espressivo*

17

p *p*

19

cre - - - scen - - - do

molto

f

Ex. 4.12 Verdi-Liszt (2nd version), bb. 15 - 21

When the chorus joins in *fortissimo* the first transcription stops at the pinnacle of *crescendo*, whilst the second version erupts with cascades of parallel octaves and *fff tutti* chords, proclaiming ‘all honour and glory to Charles V’ (Don Carlo). Although appearing indulgent at first glance, Liszt has drawn the bassoon, cello, and bass parts out of the texture and made a feature of them. This drives the section onwards and allows the pianist to achieve the incredible resonance and body of sound of the chorus. Having heightened the tension to such a degree, however, Liszt must resolve it, and does so in a whirlwind of octaves and shimmering *tremolando*. One final glittering cadenza and we return to F minor and Don Carlo’s melody, this time the right hand also embellished.

There is a similar sense of refinement and, to quote Suttoni once more, ‘subjugation of virtuosity for its own sake to the nature of the dramatic material’ when comparing the concluding passages of this scene. Don Carlo brings the tonality round to F major singing ‘saro lo giuro a te ed a Dio’ (Ex. 4.9), accompanied with unchanging forces in Verdi’s score (the harp’s sextuplets in particular remaining). From this point onwards in the first transcription the improvising, virtuoso Liszt of old penetrates the material to the detriment of its dramatic content. The melody is played out in the middle register at the top of left hand chords, while the right hand shimmers away playing *tremolo*. This *tremolo* then occupies the middle of three staves on which this section is written, allowing the right hand to take the melody (Ex. 4.13).

Ex. 4.13 Verdi-Liszt (1st version), bb. 99 - 101

On the whole it is a somewhat fussy, ineffective rendering and, as it progresses through heavily repeated four-part chords in both hands towards the end of the piece, it is misplaced pyrotechnics and not the musico-dramatic content which occupies listeners' attention (Ex. 4.14).

(103)

(104)

106

107

Ex. 4.14 Verdi-Liszt (1st version), bb. 103 - 107

Returning to this passage in the second transcription, Liszt clearly recognised the weakness of his earlier attempt and rectified it with sweeping changes. Don Carlo's *piano* melody is unobstructed while the left hand oscillates through *pianissimo* arpeggiated figures (notated smaller) below (Ex. 4.15).

41

p cantando

pp

una corda

dolcissimo

8

43

1 2 3 2 1 2 4 3 2

8

rinforz. e ritard.

Z. 12 400

Ex. 4.15 Verdi-Liszt (2nd version), bb. 41 - 44

Through the wisdom of Charlemagne, and glorification of Don Carlo as the newly elected Holy Roman Emperor, Ernani is pardoned for his crime.

In the *Ernani* transcriptions we can see aspects of what Bartók described as ‘Liszt’s many-sidedness’.²³ Approaching the same source material, Liszt was able to compose two works, each from a different perspective, and each possessing a distinct identity of its own. The first version is a remnant of Liszt’s career as a touring virtuoso, full of the improvisatory qualities that had previously served him so well. The choice of numbers from Verdi’s opera provided a framework upon which Liszt could expand rhapsodically, laying the foundations in the finale from Act I and developing towards climax in Act III. In the second transcription, Liszt approaches Verdi’s opera with a far greater consideration of the dramatic content and how it is reflected musically. By subjugating virtuosity for its own sake, Liszt places the characters and their actions at the heart of the scene, thus offering a truer representation of the operatic experience.

²³ Introduction, p. 9

Conclusion

While Liszt's transcriptions can be seen as one large portion of his compositional output that mainly stems from his years as a touring virtuoso, the reality is that transcription was a serious genre that held a great deal of importance to Liszt and his artistic development. The Introduction to this thesis contextualised the importance of transcription by highlighting the scale of Liszt's dedication in number; range of genres and composers whose works were incorporated; and, most importantly, the longevity of Liszt's commitment to this art form, spanning his entire composing career. Despite its importance, research in this field is still largely concerned with uncovering the level of quantitative fidelity Liszt's ostensible copy shares with the original composition, while little consideration has been given to the contextual dimensions of these works.¹ Subsequently, as Jonathan Kregor most recently underlined, scholarly work on Liszt's transcriptions 'overlooks many of the musical and social issues in which a fundamental component of nineteenth-century culture like the piano transcription could be implicated'.² This has left our understanding of one of the most important figures of nineteenth-century music incomplete.

However, it is not only the method of research that has left lacunae in our knowledge. The Introduction also highlighted that a pocket of compositions, and composers, have been the subject of the majority of published research in this area, thereby overlooking significant portions of Liszt's output. The final issue raised was over the depth of the studies written on this subject. Looking through Michael Saffle's research survey, 'Franz Liszt: A Guide to Research', hardly any of the publications stretch to beyond thirty pages, with most roughly ten pages long. As far as this topic is concerned, 'Liszt as Transcriber' is a welcome starting point in what should be a much wider, and deeper, exploration of the social, political, and contextual issues and considerations Liszt would have faced when transcribing a composer's work. Since it is the only book-length monograph, outside of doctoral dissertations, to be published on the subject of Liszt's transcriptions, there are still a wealth of issues, events, relationships, and approaches to be explored before we have a truly contextualised understanding of them.

¹ Introduction, p. 1

² J. Kregor: *Liszt as Transcriber* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 2

In this thesis I have sought to use Liszt as a pivotal artistic figure around whom the transcriptions may be contextualised in relation to the artists whose works he transcribed. Instead of merely looking at the notated music for its meaning, which is communicated and disseminated in resounding, and relying on comments of quantitative fidelity, the works have been placed in context by a deeper understanding of the reality of the composer. This reality was achieved through knowledge of the people, places, and events relevant to Liszt at that time. In Chapter 1 the importance of Italian opera as a compositional genre in the study of Liszt's music was highlighted, and Bryan James's doctoral dissertation provided the basis for a discussion of Liszt's aesthetic response to this genre. James demonstrates that, in Liszt's view, the reliance of composers on musico-dramatic procedures in Italian opera resulted in 'a conventional manner for rendering all feeling and situations'.³ In suggesting which composer of Italian opera Liszt may have been keen to emulate when writing his own opera, *Sardanapale*, James turns to Saverio Mercadante and, specifically, his opera *Le due illustri rivali*. Against this I have argued that Liszt's ideology for the development of Italian opera could more likely be found in the works of Giuseppe Verdi, as expressed through his transcription focus. In his doctoral dissertation, Kenneth Hamilton concluded that 'it is important to emphasise that the significance of the fantasias and arrangements lies as much in their own quality as in their influence on Liszt's original works'.⁴ He continues, 'If the discussion of the arranged pieces in Liszt's oeuvre inevitably leads us to talk about the original works it is because they are an inseparable part of his legacy'.⁵ Despite the wealth of operas Mercadante had published whilst Liszt was at the height of his career as a virtuoso, only one became the subject of a transcription by Liszt. Once placed in context, we see that this one occasion was in order to appease a disgruntled Milanese public. Verdi, on the other hand, had seven operas transcribed by Liszt between 1847 and 1883 - after Liszt's touring career had come to an end, and precisely when he was embarking on the composition of large-scale 'serious works'.

³ B. James: *Liszt's 'Sardanapale': Its Creation, Sketches, and the Reception of Mid-Nineteenth Century Italian Opera Conventions* (dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009), p. 31

⁴ K. Hamilton: *The Opera Fantasias and Transcriptions of Franz Liszt: A Critical Study* (dissertation, Oxford University, Balliol College, 1989), p. 320

⁵ Ibid.

Within the collection of Verdi operas that were transcribed by Liszt, one subject in particular stands out not only as a transcription, but as an opera. *Ernani* was staged during Liszt's first season as resident Kappellmeister in Weimar; it was the first Italian opera to be produced there under his baton; it was the only Italian opera to be produced more than once; and, uniquely among the Verdi transcriptions, spawned two versions. The first of these, written in 1847 and directly coinciding with Liszt's embarking on the composition of his own opera, remained unpublished during his lifetime. When compared to its published counterpart, the *Première paraphrase* shares little in common in terms of thematic treatment and execution, as Hamilton points out: 'the revised version of the *Ernani Fantasia* can scarcely be described as a "second edition"...the differences are too extensive for that'.⁶ *Hernani* was well known to Liszt as a play and, in light of its Romantic, revolutionary background, it has been possible to build up a broader context, relevant to Liszt, around the subject of *Ernani*. Subsequently, I have been able to discuss Liszt's handling of Verdi's opera in the contextually nuanced manner Jonathan Kregor advocates.

Part of the success of Kregor's 'Liszt as Transcriber' is a discussion the author engages in regarding the way in which a transcriber captures the work's truth.⁷ Since transcribing music predates Liszt by hundreds of years,⁸ it is the approach he took to this compositional form that was new. Going beyond merely the composer's original score Liszt was able to encapsulate extra-musical elements, such as the intrinsic drama within an opera, thereby setting his transcription works apart from those of his contemporaries. This notion has been explored in greater detail, and the different approaches by composers towards transcribing, and their results, were discussed. As the only significant challenger to Liszt's position as the greatest virtuoso of his time, Sigismund Thalberg provided the comparison. In comparing and contrasting Liszt and Thalberg's transcriptions based on the same opera, I have demonstrated how Liszt was better able to preserve the dramatic impact of that work, cementing its place in the modern piano repertoire. In light of this, the focus could return to the subject of *Ernani*.

⁶ K. Hamilton, p. 250

⁷ J. Kregor, 'Introduction' and 'Chapter 1 - Models and Methods'

⁸ J. S. Bach was one of the most prolific arrangers of his own and others' works

Having already investigated and contextualised Liszt's relationship with *Ernani*, the two transcriptions based on the opera have been compared, contrasted, and discussed as utterly different responses to the same source material, directly reflecting the periods of Liszt's life in which they were written. The first transcription, as a remnant of Liszt's years as a touring virtuoso, bears the hallmarks of an improvised fantasia. Taking the themes from Verdi's opera and presenting them in a manner that reflects the original score, they are then subjected to rhapsodic expansion and transformation, characterised by the use of techniques such as Thalbergian arpeggios, tremolo, and parallel chords. The focus is mainly drawn to the way in which these themes are treated musically, with little dramatic response to their context within the opera. Upon revisiting the subject a decade later, Liszt undoubtedly recognised that his *Première paraphrase* did not do justice to the complex, character-driven conflict of *Ernani* and totally reevaluated his approach. The opera had been written for the more intimate atmosphere of La Fenice, and, as such, grandiose choral effects could be downplayed, instead placing the focus on personal conflict. Liszt acknowledges the compositional leap forward Verdi made with this opera and, likewise, concentrates on personal conflict - Don Carlo's solemn apostrophising is brought to the fore and contrasted sharply with the rapturous pardon of Ernani. The stark contrast between the two transcriptions exemplifies the importance of this opera to Liszt. Dissatisfied with the earlier version, it was discarded and a replacement written, with virtuosity for its own sake subjugated in favour of its careful use as a dramatic tool. In this way, Liszt invokes the timbre, dynamic, colour, and spirit of the opera as it would be in performance.

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