

**INTRODUCTION TO GRADUATE STUDIES
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**THE PIANO MASTER CLASS OF FRANZ LISZT AT
WEIMAR, FROM 1869 TO 1886**

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Introduction

Among the most influential developments in piano-pedagogy, and thus music-education, was the creation of the master class by the extraordinary Franz Liszt (1811-1886) in the mid-1850s.¹ Liszt's example has been changed in several aspects compared to the way that master classes are conceived today. Every masterful musician during the last fifty years has performed several times in master classes with notable teachers and has received criticism about their performance. Several conservatories, music schools, colleges, and universities have piano group lessons on their curriculum. The use of this teaching concept is present today even in other areas such as physics.

Sources for this study come primarily from the diaries of Liszt's pupils. These documents describe each lesson or class and detail the master's advice on practice and improvements. The *Diary Notes of August Göllerich*, for example, records actual phrases that Liszt pronounced after hearing his pupils perform.² In particular, the memoirs of one of Liszt's American pupils, Amy Fay (1844-1928), have served as an excellent source. The memoirs describe the lessons, her emotions before and after playing, her relationship

¹ Richard Zimdars, "The Piano Master Classes of Franz Liszt: Observations by August Göllerich," *Journal of The American Liszt Society* XLIV (Fall 1998), 35-46.

² August Göllerich, *Franz Liszts Klavierunterricht von 1884-1886*. "Tagebuchaufzeichnungen von August Göllerich", von Wilhelm Jerger [The Piano master Classes of Franz Liszt 1884-1886. *Diary Notes of August Göllerich* (Regensburg, 1975), 142.

with Liszt, and his admiration for her.³ Additional researches provide a musician's scholar's overview of the main body of Liszt's music and contain brief discussions that provide more details about Liszt's life. Some of Liszt's biographies were also consulted to provide a glimpse of the context of his classes. Books by Alan Walker, who has been considered among the most respected Liszt experts in recent history, have also been used as one of the principal sources of this research.⁴

In this essay I discuss Liszt's life as a teacher: the nature, frequency, size, duration and fees of the classes; the basis for the selection of his pupils and their repertoires; the methods and approaches of his pedagogy; and finally, the testimonies of Liszt's pupils, and their experiences in his classes. After reading this paper, I hope music students will understand why Franz Liszt should be considered important not only as a composer or pianist, but also as a teacher.

Liszt's Life as a Teacher

Liszt started teaching the piano in 1827, during his mid-adolescent years, in Paris and taught until July of 1886, the last month of his life in Weimar. Madame August Boissier, whose daughter (Valerie) was a pupil of Liszt's in 1832, recorded a detailed account of Liszt's early teaching in her diary.⁵ Those lessons were private. According to

³ Amy Fay, *Music-Study in Germany* (New York: Macmillan, 1913).

⁴ Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt, 1861-1886, Vol. III* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996) & *Living with Liszt: The Diary of Carl Lachmund, an American pupil of Liszt, 1882-1884* (New York: Stuyvesant, 1995).

⁵ Madame Auguste Boissier, *List als Lehrer* [A diary of Franz Liszt as teacher], trans. Elyse Mach (Berlin: Zsolnay, 1930). For more detailed information about those lessons see this text.

Walker, more than four-hundred students ultimately passed through Liszt's studio, with many becoming eminent musicians themselves.⁶ Some had international careers as concert artists, while others devoted their energies to teaching. Many who attended his master class were proud to be known as Liszt's pupils and advertised their affiliation with him. Some watched and listened. According to the *New Grove Dictionary* and reinforced by Walker, Liszt was the creator of the "master class."⁷

When the Royal Academy of Music opened (1875) in Budapest, as its first President, Liszt insisted that all piano students should study composition and that all composition students should study the piano. Until his death, all his students satisfied his requirements to graduate in improvisation. Although not all his students became performers, each was expected to compose. As a result, his students developed skills in creation and improvisation, skills undeveloped by most twentieth-century pianists. Today, however, many jobs open to pianists require, in addition to good technique and excellent performance, skillful improvisation.

According to Watson, Liszt's principal periods of teaching can be identified geographically: Paris (1827-35), Geneva (1835-36), Weimar (1850s), Rome (1860s), and Weimar, Budapest and Rome (1869-86).⁸ In Weimar, he continued giving some private lessons, but the majority of his energies were devoted to the master classes. According

⁶ Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt, 1861-1886*, Vol. III, 228.

⁷ O. W. Neighbour, "Liszt, Franz – Liszt as teacher," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online*, ed. Laura Macy (www.grovemusic.com): accessed 4 February 2003).

⁸ Derek Watson, *Liszt* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989), 173-74.

to Friedheim, former pupils who became notable artists still continued to attend private lessons during the morning hours.⁹

Liszt's Classes

Liszt's master classes originated in the mid-1850s and became world-famous in Weimar, during the period of 1869 to 1886.¹⁰ They were usually held on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, from 3:30 to 6:00 p.m., in the music room of the Hofgärtnerei, his residence.¹¹ There were two pianos, one full-size Bechstein grand and a small Ibach upright. Class sizes varied between four¹² and forty.¹³ Pianists made up the largest part of the group, but composers, violinists, cellists, and singers were also known to attend these lessons.

Liszt charged nothing for his lessons. In fact, he was exceedingly generous with money. He did not want any of his students to suffer material hardships. Thus, he often went out of his way to help them with loans or monetary gifts. For example, when one of his pupils, Edwin Klahre, came to study with him, Liszt asked about his financial

⁹ Arthur Friedheim, *Life and Liszt: The Recollections of a Concert Pianist* (New York: Taplinger, 1961), 46.

¹⁰ Richard Zimdars, *The Piano master Classes of Franz Liszt: Observations by August Göllerich*, 36.

¹¹ A Court Gardener's house, where Liszt lived when he returned to the Weimar in 1869, which adjoined the Goethe Park.

¹² Amy Fay, *Music-Study in Germany*, 210.

¹³ Alexander Siloti, *My Memories of Liszt* (Edinburg: Methuen Simpson, 1913), 16.

situation. Liszt did not want Klahre to pay him but expressed concern about Klahre's finances.¹⁴

In a typical class, as soon as the students gathered together for the lesson, each one would put his or her own music by different composers on a side table next to the piano. When Liszt arrived in the room, he would select one of the scores and ask "Who is playing this?" The owner of that score would seat themselves at the piano, and the class would start. The student would start to play after Liszt had made some introductory remarks.

An important factor of Liszt's teaching was the variety of repertoire. Repertoire included the works of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847), Robert Schumann (1810-1856), Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849), Johannes Brahms (1833-1897), Adolf Henselt (1814-1889), Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894), Joachim Raff (1822-1882), Moritz Moszkowski (1854-1925), and Xaver Scharwenka (1850-1924).

Liszt knew these composers' works and his ability to sight-read was legendary.

According to Watson, two celebrated works were forbidden in his classes, however: his own Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 and Chopin's B-Flat-Minor Scherzo; he contended that students played these pieces too frequently.¹⁵ A variety of repertoire was assigned an important part in Liszt's teaching.

¹⁴ Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Final Years*, 243.

¹⁵ Derek Watson, *Liszt*, 174.

Liszt's Pupils

Many students sought lessons with Liszt; some brought recommendations from important persons. Liszt's decision to accept the students however, was not based on these letters. Instead, he based his selection on their auditions. Each had to play for him before they were admitted. Some of those performances were so unfortunate that Liszt recommended that the student attend a conservatory to learn notes and dynamics marks. Other students who watched the scene were also shamed and embarrassed by the performance and the master's words, but Lachmund does not cite them names. The "Diary of Carl Lachmund" has several citations of such examples.¹⁶

The first generation of Liszt's students contains names such as Hans Bronsart von Schellendorf, Baron Hans Guido von Bülow, Karl Klindworth, and Carl Tausig.¹⁷ Second-generation students included were Alexander Siloti, Arthur Friedheim, Emil Sauer, Eugène d'Albert, and Moriz Rosenthal.¹⁸

Liszt's Piano Pedagogy

Oddly, perhaps, at the heart of Liszt's philosophy of teaching was the notion of competition. His master class was created because he believed that it was through playing to one another that students become motivated to compete with each other. It is

¹⁶Carl Lachmund, quoted in Alan Walker, *Living with Liszt: The Diary of Carl Lachmund, an American pupil of Liszt, 1882-1884*, 20, 32, 72, 91, 101, 154-55.

¹⁷ Go to Appendix A and B to see pictures of Liszt and his pupils.

¹⁸ Go to Appendix C to see a list of all of Liszt's Pupils, from 1829 to 1886, grouped according to their nationalities.

through such competition that students, in turn, developed a higher level of performance.¹⁹ Liszt preferred such teaching methodology for several reasons. Firstly, the teacher does not need to play the same piece over and over again for different pupils nor must he constantly repeat suggestions for fingering, phrasings, pedaling, and other technical concepts. Secondly, if the pupil who is only a listener knows the work played, he would have the same advantage as the performer; and even if he does not know the work played, he would still be better prepared to study it later. Thirdly, because even the best teacher is prone to bad days, such a class system ensures that everyone gains during these bad days. And, fourthly, the best aspect of class lessons was that the pupils have the opportunity to play for critical listeners and gain confidence in the process.²⁰

Liszt's approach to the pedagogy of piano did not rely on using pedagogical methods to solve technical problems. In fact, he rarely addressed technical problems, even though the students showed some weaknesses. Evidence from his pupils suggested his disgust for a mechanical, soulless approach to performance.²¹ Instead, his emphasis was placed on the quality of sound and interpretation and on variety of nuance. Of course, the students heard in him a perfect technique in the way he executed difficult passages and naturally tended to imitate the master. The importance of his own playing to his teaching was based on simple imitation. Those who desired explicit feedback and knew how to ask for it could always have Liszt explain the intricacies and subtleties of

¹⁹ Alan Waker, *Franz Liszt, The Final Years*, 228

²⁰ Arthur Friedheim, *Life and Liszt: The recollections of a Concert Pianist*, 51.

²¹ Derek Watson, *Liszt*, 171

pedaling and even get him to suggest useful fingerings. According to Gordon, Liszt did this more often in his small classes in Rome than the larger groups in Weimar.²²

He also induced his students to adopt his own approach to a piece by encouraging them to create an image of the kind of sound they wanted to hear before playing. As far as he was concerned, the mind helps the body to make the ideal sound. “Only picture the image,” he said, “and the body will find its own way to project it.”²³ Although he had principles of interpretations, he reinforced the idea that “There are no great teachers, only great pupils.”²⁴ He wanted to make his pupils understand that the mind has to drive the body, not the other way around. He was different from other teachers who tried to solve the problems with scales and arpeggios. Liszt understood the power of an idea, and he knew that when the human being is inspired, he or she has the capacity to turn ideas into reality.

In addition, Liszt possessed a phenomenal ability to read scores. He emphasized the importance of analyzing the music, phrase-by-phrase. His goal was to help the student to comprehend the meaning behind the notes.²⁵

The performance of each pupil was greeted with either encouraging praise or damaging criticism.²⁶ The following is an example of an angry comment after a performance of Chopin’s B-Minor Sonata:

²² Stewart Gordon, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher* (New York: Schirmer, 2000), 290.

²³ Franz Liszt, quoted in Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt*, 232.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 232

²⁵ O. W. Neighbor, “*Liszt, Franz – Liszt as teacher*,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online*.

That was definitely not played, but skewered [*gestochen*]. If you have no ears to hear, why do you play the piano? With whom did you study that? With Marmontel it costs 20 marks an hour – here everything is free. There you learn nothing, whereas here you can at least learn something. You must go to some conservatory, but not come to me.²⁷

Of course, everyone was ashamed, both for the performance and for the criticism.

Sometimes he just made funny criticisms such as the phrase, “Do not chop beefsteak for us,” to a young student tapping out the opening chords of the Waldstein Sonata.²⁸

The success of Liszt’s teaching, according to Machnek, is based on five qualities of his pedagogy: patience and understanding, interest, helpfulness, encouragement, and pleasing disposition along with good humor,²⁹ qualities that each teacher should possess. The learning process is more effective if the student’s confidence in his teacher is supported. This was, with no doubt, how Liszt’s pupils felt and how they described his teaching.

Testimonies of Liszt’s Pupils

Pupils who have written about Liszt’s piano classes include Amy Fay, Anton Strelezki, August Göllerich, William Mason, and Carl Lachmund. Fay described the color, excitement, and sheer magic of the classes. According to her, Liszt presented an

²⁶ Franz Liszt, quoted in August Göllerich, *Franz Liszts Klavierunterricht von 1884-1886*, 142.

²⁷ Franz Liszt, quoted in *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁸ Franz Liszt, quoted in O. W. Neighbor, “Liszt, Franz – Liszt as teacher,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online*.

²⁹ More details about this subject can be found at Elsie J. Machnek, *The Pedagogy of Franz Liszt* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1965), 32-8.

idea to the pupil, and it would fast take hold of his or her mind and remain there. Music was such a real, visible idea to him that he always had a symbol, instantly, in the material world to express his idea.³⁰

August Göllerich, an Australian who studied with Liszt, provided a careful record of the master class repertory that included such information as date, location, name of performers, and Liszt's reactions. Göllerich, however, was polite enough not to reveal the identity of the performers in the cases of bad performances, only the titles of pieces played and Liszt's negative responses about the performances.

According to Mason, Liszt never taught in the ordinary sense of the word. He was impressed with how Liszt taught and carried away vivid memories of his first lesson with Liszt. According to Mason, when he finished his performance, Liszt suggested some changes, played one or two phrases to him, and motivated him to the point of enthusiasm that he put all the grit that was in him into his playing.³¹

When Liszt decided to play to his pupils, the atmosphere was turned to his figure and his music in a strong way that everything around them looked static. They never knew when it would happen, but when it did, they literally absorbed every moment of it. As Carl Lachmund described one such episode in his diary:

The mood had seized him! There were half audible exclamations of joy and astonishment; some drew quickly nearer; and then there was perfect quiet. Sitting at ease, as if comfortable, and with his hands in anything but a conventional position, he began the beautiful A flat Etude, the first from Chopin's op. 25. Oh, how convincingly every melody note, as he intoned it, spoke to one's heart, and how beautiful the rippling accompaniment shaded its emotional meaning. This he followed with

³⁰ Amy Fay, *Music-Study in Germany*, 211

³¹ William Mason, *Memories of a Musical Life*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 46.

the second, in the relative key of F minor, the one with the tricky combination of two-quarter (six-eight) against three-quarter time...³²

Beside the great performance by Liszt was the admiration he received from his students. After such a performance, everyone must have felt motivated to practice and, at least, tried to find the same quality of sound that they heard and loved. The simplicity of gestures and elegance led them to a musical ecstasy. Once again, Lachmund describes the situation:

Both etudes he played with that same quiet ease and lucidness of phrasing that always impressed one in his playing, and there was an entire absence of any show of virtuosity or of dynamic extremes, so often heard in the playing of great piano virtuosos. His apparent disregard of metric time, without disturbing the symmetry of rhythmic balance, which lent the Lisztian charm to his phrasing, was to me most characteristic and wonderful.

He had finished. No one could find word. We knew not what to say or do. We could merely, as it the custom in foreign lands, kiss his hands, those hands that had done such wonders for nearly two-thirds of a century.³³

This demonstration took place in the Hofgärtnerei on the 10th of August, 1883, when Liszt was seventy-three years old. One can only imagine how delightful it must have been to listen to the great master play. Although he was advanced in years, the quality of sound with his refined technique was always present.

Anton Strelezki described the camaraderie, friendliness, and degree of informality among Liszt and his pupils, which was not usual in those times. He related an incident when he once met Liszt on his way to a cigar-shop, when Liszt chastized him:

³² Carl Lachmund, quoted in Arthur Friedheim, *Life and Liszt: The Recollections of a Concert Pianist*, 244-45.

³³ *Ibid.*, 244-45.

“Lazybones! You ought to be at home practicing.” Then, Strelezki answered that he had already practiced four ours that day and that he was on his way home to practice more. When Liszt heard that, he invited Strelezki to his house because the talker had already practiced four hours. There, Liszt played and talked about the music his old students had played before. Thus, there was an attitude of camaraderie and friendship between Liszt and at least some of his pupils.³⁴

After reading what Liszt’s pupils wrote about him and his classes, I can conclude that the majority of Liszt’s pupils enjoyed their lessons with him. Another testimony from Amy Fay further confirms my conclusion:

Never was there such a delightful teacher and he is the first sympathetic one I’ve had. You feel so free with him, and he develops the very spirit of music in you. He doesn’t keep nagging at you all the time, but he leaves you your own conception. Now and then he will make a criticism, or play a passage, and with a few words give you enough to think of all the rest of your life. There is a delicate point to everything he says, as subtle as is he himself.³⁵

From this, I can positively affirm that Liszt’s students felt comfortable playing for him and to their classmates. Although the social position of a teacher was much higher in the nineteenth century than it is today, Liszt’s pupils not only respected and admired him, but felt comfortable at the same time to talk and listen to the great master.

³⁴ Franz Liszt, quoted in Anton Strelezki, *Personal Recollections of Chats with Liszt* (London: 1893), 10-11.

³⁵ Amy Fay, quoted in Stewart Gordon, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 290.

Conclusion

Although many topics in this essay were related to description of the classes administered by Liszt, this study has endeavored to demonstrate Liszt's importance as a teacher. As a teacher, Liszt did not set a particular program of learning but rather adapted his methods to the needs and the abilities of each student. The results of this have impacted the entire world, even to the present day.

Today, many universities have included master classes and piano group lessons in their curriculum. Liszt's model has been changed in several aspects compared to the way master classes and group lessons are conceived today. Liszt's master classes were specific to his students. After advising and working on a piece, the student had the opportunity to play the piece again and fix the mistakes or make the changes suggested on another day. Today, however, the master classes resemble an actual performance. The teacher does not necessarily know the student personally, and they would probably never meet again. Too often the teacher, to the embarrassment of the listeners, cruelly browbeats a nervous student. A good teacher shows the performer and the observers what is in the score instead of simply criticizing the performance.

On the other hand, piano group lessons, depending on the teacher, keep some good elements that help the student to grow as a performer, as a musical critic, and as a teacher. Many piano teachers use this activity to develop in the student the ability of performing in a group. At the same time, the teacher can broach musical concepts that others students can apply to their own repertoire.

In addition students become teachers by discussing the performance of their classmates. Analyzing what they listened to, and expressing what was positive and what

should be improved is an excellent sequential exercise of piano pedagogy. The students also have the opportunity to perform publicly more often than once-a-year recitals.

Another aspect that has changed since Liszt created a master class was the creation of audio recording. Before the existence of the first audio recording, people went to rehearsal, listened to even home practicing as an important event because that opportunity could scarce. I believe that when Liszt played a whole piece to his students, besides the demonstration of some musical ideas, there was a moment of great value: a private recital on the highest level of performance. The piano teachers of today seldom play a whole piece to the student. They can demonstrate a short passage but, more often, they can give a list of recording on that piece by renowned performer. This is applied to all musical instruments with rare exceptions.

My principal goal in this essay was to examine and understand Liszt's master classes in order to use this knowledge to enrich my career as a piano teacher. It is also my hope to make this work available to other music teachers who could use it as a source of information. Liszt's pedagogical contributions may serve to enhance the artistic and critical development of piano students and teachers by offering alternatives to piano instruction deeper insight to a unique way. I believe that Liszt's pedagogical style has made important contributions to modern-day piano pedagogy.

Appendix A



A gathering of Liszt's pupils outside the Hofgärtnerei, with Liszt at the window. Photograph by Louis Held, Weimar 1883.

Walter Bache (seventh from the left, with bald head), Alexander Siloti (eleventh from the left, resting his arm on his neighbor's shoulder), Alfred Reisenauer (center of picture, with his hands in his pockets, wearing a light-colored suit), Henry van Zeyl (standing in the doorway, wearing glasses), Carl von Lachmung (right foot on steps, flower in buttonhole) Frau Lachmund to his left (between the two women dressed in white) William Dayas (third from right) and Wilhelm Posse (second from right). In the left-hand window is Liszt's servant Achille Colonello.³⁶

³⁶ Caption from Zsogmond Laslo, *Franz Liszt: A Biography in Pictures* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1968) 302.

Appendix B



Franz Liszt surrounded by his pupils. Photograph by Louis Held, October 1884.

Front row, from left to right: Saul Liebling, Alexander Siloti, Arthur Friedheim, Emil von Sauer, Alfred Reisenauer, Alexander W. Gottschalg.

Back row, from left to right: Moriz Rosenthal, Viktoria Drawing, Mele Paramanoff, Franz Liszt, Friedheim's mother, Hugo Mansfeld.³⁷

³⁷ Caption from *Ibid.*, 318.

Appendix C³⁸

³⁸ Copy from Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt*, 249 - 252.

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