

FRANZ LISZT: PROPHECY IN THE LATE PIANO WORKS

BY

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Submitted to the faculty of the  
Jacobs School of Music in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree,  
Doctor of Music in Piano Performance and Literature,  
Indiana University  
May, 2014

Accepted by the faculty of the Jacobs School of Music,  
Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree Doctor of Music in Piano Performance and Literature.

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## Chapter I. Setting the Stage

Anyone who has seen the 1947 Technicolor release of *The Cat Concerto*<sup>1</sup> will be familiar with the popular music of Franz Liszt. The short cartoon features a humorous skit between cat and mouse set to the music of Liszt's wildly popular *Hungarian Rhapsody No.2* (incidentally composed exactly 100 years before the cartoon was premiered). It is this side of Liszt that the world knows all too well; the aforementioned Rhapsody, the lyrical *Liebesträume No.3*, even *La Campanella* and other accessible works from the composer's youth have bridged the gap between the canon of austere classical masterpieces and popular culture, becoming household melodies familiar to many listeners who would otherwise never think of listening to classical piano music.

However, Liszt's import as a composer certainly does not end with his appeal to the masses via American cartoons. Indeed, the compositions of his youth still claim their place in the concert repertoire with their dazzling virtuosity, accessible melodies, and zealous excitement, and rightfully so! But how many of us, performers or scholars, so easily push aside the same composer's output mere decades later in his life? How quick we are to dismiss anything composed after the great *B minor Sonata* of 1853 as insignificant, experimental, and unworthy of study or performance!

This essay will discuss and analyze several key features in the late piano music of Franz Liszt with the aim of understanding and appreciating the new directions taken in this often misunderstood music, as well as briefly tracing many of these new ideas into the output of future composers who picked up where Liszt left off in many respects.

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<sup>1</sup> A famous episode of the animated cartoon series *Tom and Jerry*.

While many of the pieces composed in the last years of Liszt's long and prolific life can be strange, confusing, or unsettling, it is this author's sincere hope that with enough exposure and understanding, the musical world can find renewed interest and appreciate the forgotten beauty in this largely underappreciated repertoire.

## Liszt's extra-musical life

Extra-musically, Liszt's life took a series of beatings around 1860. In 1858, he took as a personal affront a demonstration that was provoked after the premiere of Cornelius' *Barber of Bagdad* in Weimar, his relationship with Wagner became more aloof (the two friends and relatives broke off all contact for nearly five years), his current affair with Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein pushed him away from Weimar life (he consequently resigned from the services of the Grand Duke in the same year), in 1859 his son Daniel died at the age of twenty-one, the 1860 newspaper protest by Brahms and Joachim against Liszt and Wagner took a serious mental and emotional toll on the composer, and in a last-ditch effort to escape the Weimarian depression that was facing him, Liszt travelled to Rome to marry the Princess, only to have the Pope repeal her divorce at the last moment.<sup>2,3</sup> With this list of harrowing depressions looming over Liszt, many changes in his persona, lifestyle, and compositional/musical thought process occurred; in fact, such "...events set the pattern of Liszt's life for the remainder of his days."<sup>4</sup>

In 1865, Liszt took the lower orders of the Catholic Church, further deepening his life-long faith and forsaking his various and sundry relations with women. It is around this time that Liszt began his "vie trifurquée" or his "three-fold life" between Rome, Weimar, and Budapest that would continue until his death.<sup>5</sup> In the life of Liszt, these events and directions are not merely superfluous biographical pieces of background, but

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<sup>2</sup> Searle, *Liszt's Final Period (1860-1886)*, 67.

<sup>3</sup> Walker, *Liszt, Franz*, Grove Music Online.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Liszt was given quarter at the famed Villa d'Este by his friend Cardinal Hohenlohe, a place that inspired Liszt greatly through the rest of his life. He continued to hold masterclasses in Budapest in addition to teaching a small entourage of students that accompanied him on his journeys.



rather integral catalysts in shaping the unique and notable direction of his compositional output: "...it is against the background of these events that the works of the Liszt's last period music must be viewed, for they explain the personal significance of some of these compositions, and also show the direction in which his thoughts were tending."<sup>6</sup> It is widely accepted across the literature that Liszt grew increasingly isolated, depressed, and brooding in his final years:

"The late pieces are autobiographical. Around 1877 Liszt began to suffer from bouts of depression. He told Lina Ramann: 'I carry a deep sadness of the heart which must now and then break out in sound'. His 'deep sadness' arose from a variety of difficult personal circumstances, including the deaths of family members and close acquaintances. His physical condition also began to deteriorate, and he suffered from a variety of ailments including dropsy, ague and, towards the end of his life, cataracts, which made it difficult for him to read and write letters, let alone compose."<sup>7</sup>

Regarding Liszt in particular, one cannot simply view his musical advances and so-called "experiments" as natural, pre-disposed evolutions of a musical style he set forth in his youth with the intention of completing, but rather as the "language of outcries and asides, of whispers and laments"<sup>8</sup> that stemmed from his personal hardships.<sup>9</sup>

Liszt's late compositions for the piano explore several new directions in musical style. A passage from fellow composer and author Humphrey Searle summarizes many of these explorations nicely: "The style has become stark and austere, there are long passages in single notes and a considerable use of whole-tone chords, and anything resembling a cadence is avoided. The result gives a curiously indefinite feeling, as if he

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<sup>6</sup> Searle, *Liszt's Final Period (1860-1886)*, 68.

<sup>7</sup> Walker, *Liszt, Franz*, Grove Music Online.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> As one cannot separate Beethoven's late output with the personal conflict of his deafness especially as expressed in the Heiligenstadt Testament, neither should one be quick to dismiss Liszt's personal anecdotes as insignificant in their relation to the direction his music took after this period.

were launching out into a new world of whose possibilities he was not quite sure.”<sup>10</sup>

Scholar R. Larry Todd provides additional support towards Liszt’s innovative powers:

“Liszt’s contributions commonly cited in the literature include... his innovative approaches to tonal planning that led ineluctably to powerful excursions into atonality, his extension of the major-minor tonal system through a variety of nondiatonic scales, his development of progressions with quartal and other nonthird-based harmonies, and his striking applications of diminished-seventh chords, augmented triads, and other chromatic harmonies.”<sup>11</sup>

In fact, most (if not all) literature on the subject of late, experimental, or progressive Liszt agree that the main focus of his output in his final years was neither satisfied and complacent with the styles of the times nor nostalgic of the past traditions, but rather a decisive and demanding push forwards into the unknown. Even Schoenberg agrees: “A man like this is no longer an artist, but something greater: a prophet.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Searle, *Liszt's Final Period (1860-1886)*, 69.

<sup>11</sup> Todd, *The "Unwelcome Guest" Regaled: Franz Liszt and the Augmented Triad*, 94.

<sup>12</sup> Forte, *Liszt's Experimental Idiom and Music of the Early Twentieth Century*, 210.

## Chapter II. Harmonic explorations

Perhaps the most novel, forward-minded, revolutionary, and interesting aspects of Liszt's late output are his ventures in harmony. In contrast to the total serialism<sup>13</sup> that evolved out of the Second Viennese School, in general the basic functions of rhythm and phrasing here remain rooted in the traditions of the Romantic style; it is rather the organization of pitch (both horizontally and vertically) that stands apart from its contemporary norms. The following major works (all relatively early in their respective composers' outputs) are often accredited with harmonic explorations and novel directions in "new" music:

1905: Ravel *Miroirs*

1908: Webern *Passacaglia* for Orchestra, Op.1

1909: Schoenberg *Drei Klavierstücke*, Op.11

1910: Berg *Piano Sonata* Op.1, Debussy *Preludes* Book I,

1912: Schoenberg *Pierrot Lunaire*

This brief and certainly non-exhaustive list of often cited groundbreaking works puts us in a relatively concise ballpark: nearly a decade after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. To take a look at the other end of the spectrum, some major works that were composed by contemporaries near the end of Liszt's life, illustrating that a strong current of romanticism and tonality still very much pervaded the musical world at this time:

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<sup>13</sup> An extension of interval serialism that sought to control all aspects of music (such as duration, volume, rhythm, etc.) rather than just pitch.

1885: Brahms *Symphony No.4*, Op.98

1887: Scriabin *Etude in C-sharp minor*, Op.2, No.1

1888: Debussy *Deux Arabesques*

1889: Strauss *Don Juan*, Op.20

1892: Rachmaninoff *Morceaux de Fantasia*, Op.3

With this context of tonality in mind, it is no wonder that Schoenberg's atonal forays in the 1900s were regarded as such novelties. In fact, even the Grove dictionary touts this as a discovery: "In 1908 Schoenberg abandoned tonality; he was the first composer to do so."<sup>14</sup> It seemed that the musical world was wandering without much direction after the influence of Wagner and his stretching of tonal function to its breaking point, but is it truly fair to credit Schoenberg with the sudden "invention" of such a gesture? In fact, with some careful discussion and observation of Liszt's later compositions, there is ample evidence to suggest that many of the trends that later culminated into the Second Viennese School were in fact set forth decades earlier by Liszt himself.

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<sup>14</sup> Neighbour, *Schoenberg*, Arnold, Grove Music Online.

## A new use of an old chord: The augmented triad

One of the harmonic structures Liszt employed most frequently and experimentally was the augmented triad. In the composer's own words: "The augmented triad was then still something remarkable. Wagner had used these chords in his *Venusberg*, that is, around 1845, but they were written for the first time by me here [in the Petrarch Sonnet] in 1841." Of course, the existence of an augmented triad had long preceded this date in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; such harmonies can easily be found in the music of Mozart, Brahms, and others, even going back to Rameau's *Traite de l'harmonie* in 1722.<sup>15</sup> The main difference in the classical/pre-classical augmented fifth and Liszt's new use of it is this: the harmony had been used until now in a strictly ephemeral sense, that is, the raised 5<sup>th</sup> of the triad was merely an intensification of a passing motion upwards, and the augmented triad treated as a much stronger and less stable dominant function with the raised 5<sup>th</sup> voice leading upwards instead of the natural 5<sup>th</sup> falling to the root of the tonic it would resolve to.

In Liszt's hands, the augmented triad finds a new role in the spotlight. Rather than using the harmony as a decoration or replacement of a dominant function, Liszt often formed entire worlds of tonality around the augmented triad *as a tonic sonority*. This, of course, goes against everything we know of conventional tonality, as the augmented triad 1) has no "root", 2) is not a stable harmonic structure, and 3) is not diatonic in any major/minor key. In fact, as late as 1850, theorist Adolf Marx shuddered at the thought of an augmented triad used in such a context: "If we return to the major triad and raise the fifth, the shrill sound of the augmented triad confronts us. A sequence

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<sup>15</sup> Todd, *The "Unwelcome Guest" Regaled: Franz Liszt and the Augmented Triad*, 105.

of such triads has never (at least up to the present) been dared – and we would not presume to motivate someone to undertake it.”<sup>16</sup> This is strong language against the harmony at a time when Liszt was getting ready to dare just that! Not only did this chord find a place at the center of many of Liszt’s later harmonic explorations, but indeed helped pave the way for much harmonic exploration of the future: “... the free atonal formations of Liszt’s radical late music grew out of chromatic embellishments to the augmented triad.”<sup>17</sup>

We will now take a more detailed look at some of the music to see the augmented chord and its resulting shifts in Liszt’s views on conventional tonality in action. It should be noted here, that Liszt never truly abandoned convention altogether; this would perhaps be a description more fitting of Schoenberg’s atonal experiments of the early 1900s. Rather, he was setting out into the unknown, leaving one foot in the past and letting the other explore the uncharted waters of the future.

“And in place of a harmonic hierarchy based upon major and minor triads, Liszt developed other alternatives, among them constellations of chromatic harmonies revolving around an augmented triad. All of this brought Liszt to the realm of atonality... [he] found it convenient to work with music of smaller dimensions, in particular, relatively short works for piano.”

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<sup>16</sup> Todd, *The "Unwelcome Guest" Regaled: Franz Liszt and the Augmented Triad*, 106.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 112

### ***La Lugubre Gondola I*, an exercise in role reversal**

For a starting point of analysis, we will look at the opening of *La Lugubre Gondola I*. The pervasive left hand accompaniment figure problematizes our sense of key immediately (Figure 1). At first glance, one may simplify it as a modified V<sup>6</sup> chord with the A-flat acting as a raised 5<sup>th</sup> and pointing to m.19 as its inevitable resolution to F minor. This is not a wholly incorrect interpretation, and indeed many scholars in the literature hear it simply as this, largely due to the key signature, 7-1 bass motion, and several inflections made from the melody. However, we can benefit greatly from a different and more “outside of the box” mentality. In fact, one scholar pushes for a D-flat minor tonic, giving several points of support towards his claim.<sup>18</sup> The difficulty in finding the “right answer” to the tonality problem in much of late Liszt is exactly this: we are often looking in the wrong place - the past.

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<sup>18</sup> Skoumal, *Liszt's Androgynous Harmony*, 66.

Figure 1

DIE TRAUER-GONDEL Nr. 1  
LA LUGUBRE GONDOLA No. 1

The image displays the first 18 measures of the piano piece 'Die Trauer-Gondel Nr. 1' by Franz Liszt. The score is written for piano in 8/8 time, with a key signature of two flats (B-flat major). The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The piece begins with a melodic line in the treble clef and a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the bass clef. Performance markings include 'mf' (mezzo-forte), 'una corda' (piano), 'marcato' (marked), and 'sempre legato' (always legato). The score is divided into four systems, with measure numbers 6, 12, and 18 indicated at the beginning of each system. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings.

With the relatively complete absence of primary source material (letters, memoirs, or notes from Liszt himself) to prove or disprove Liszt’s harmonic goals other than at-best urban legends passed on through generations by word of mouth, it is difficult to claim, with any authority, exactly what he was thinking in this admittedly experimental music. Is it thus possible, while unprecedented, that Liszt is indeed treating the augmented harmony itself as an ambiguous pseudo-tonic? There is significant evidence towards this claim that is well worth considering. The piece begins and ends on the same augmented triad in the same inversion (Figures 1, 3); the entire opening 38 measures repeat themselves almost verbatim a whole step lower beginning in m.39, the “transition” passages (m.31-38, 69-76) prepare the next “key area” by falling and stopping on a new



augmented triad which goes on to begin the next section (Figure 2), and finally any instances of normal tertian harmonies (major/minor triads), while rare enough as they are, occur in clearly transitory and highly unstable passages in the form. It is almost as if Liszt is simply swapping functions between the chords, bookmarking the piece and emphasizing important structural events with augmented triads and using major/minor triads in the most unstable transitory sections. While the ear may still want to hear the conclusion of this piece as horribly unstable and not at all at rest, perhaps Liszt was pointing our ears (or at least the ears of over 100 years ago) towards a new acceptance of tonality away from the textbook perfect authentic cadence to a root position major or minor triad. Perhaps the “experiment” here is to forge a new harmonic hierarchy to supersede if not replace the world’s dependence on diatonic triads and to open doors for composers decades down the road to pick up the baton and push the same boundaries further.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Notably, *La Lugubre Gondola II* does not share such an ambiguous tonal center. Rather than a large dependence on augmented triads, the second version is heavily infused with diminished harmonies in the introductory 34 measures. The “main theme” while still poignantly chromatic, spells a much clearer F minor tonic both through the oscillating E - F bass motion and the melodic implications such as the accented passing G in m.37 tonicizing F as tonic. This piece also contains a completely new and entirely major/minor central section (m.69-108) which perhaps acts as a stabilizing force in the midst of the highly chromatic outer sections.

Figure 2

Musical score for Figure 2, measures 24-37. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment. Measures 24-29 show a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the bass clef. Measures 30-37 show a more complex accompaniment with some rests and dynamic markings. The right hand has a melodic line with some grace notes and slurs. Dynamic markings include *mf legato* and *marcato*. There are also some performance instructions like *mf legato* and *marcato*.

Figure 3

Musical score for Figure 3, measures 107-114. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment. Measures 107-114 show a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the bass clef. The right hand has a melodic line with some grace notes and slurs. Dynamic markings include *dim.*, *p*, *pp*, and *ppp*. There are also some performance instructions like *dim.*, *p*, *pp*, and *ppp*.

## Wagner's death: New music's life

Another two of the short piano pieces that explore the question of tonality are *R.W. – Venezia* and *Am Grabe Richard Wagners*, both composed out of the grief of Wagner's death in 1883; we will talk about the former piece first. Again, to the traditional ear this may seem like a simple “unstable-stable-unstable” structure without a real tonal center, but again we should look a bit closer at exactly what Liszt is doing here. Zdenek Skoumal presents a very interesting and colorful point of view on Liszt's handling of the augmented triad, seeing it as an “androgynous” dominant function harmony with the aim of “...a weakening of the traditional tonic-dominant axis by minimizing the contrast between its two constituent elements.”<sup>20</sup> In many ways, this goes hand in hand with our exploration of the tonal scheme of *La Lugubre Gondola I*, essentially replacing or substituting traditional major/minor harmonies with “new” and non-traditional harmonies, such as the augmented triad. However, an even deeper interpretation may suggest the augmented triad attaining a more elevated role as a central and functional harmonic structure, and not simply an intensified dominant.

The piece begins clearly enough by spelling an augmented triad based on C-sharp, which will also act as a pedal through the first half of the piece (Figure 4). Through melodic half-step #7-1 motion in the top voice, the A of this “androgynous” triad resolves to B-flat in m.5, keeping the C-sharp/D-flat and F as common tones. By the same principle, the same motion occurs in m.9 in the two voices that were left unchanged in the first shift, now spelling an augmented triad based on D, one full half step above where we started. The process then repeats itself before digressing into a building of climbing

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<sup>20</sup> Skoumal, *Liszt's Androgynous Harmony*, 51.

triads.<sup>21</sup> The question to ask at this point is: what just happened? Can we garner a sense of key or tonal stability out of this process-based modulatory opening? A possible answer to this question lies in the context of the whole; we reach an inarguable epiphany in m.31 with a surprisingly clear B-flat major triad which begins a distinctive B section (Figure 5). Two more sequenced rising major triads ensue before the music reaches its absolute height only to climax on the same augmented triad based on C-sharp that began the piece (Figure 6). The devil, here, is in the motivic details.

Figure 4

R. W. – VENEZIA

<sup>21</sup> We can find similar gestures elsewhere in this repertoire; in the chromatic buildup in m.58 of *Unstern!*; a strikingly similar passage occurs beginning in m.176 of *Angelus!* from *Années de pèlerinage III*, which even highlights the same C-sharp based augmented triads (especially the tied chords of m.183 and 185, which is precisely the exact same chord that propels *R.W. – Venezia* into its B section).

Figure 5



Figure 6



The first major motivic or melodic moving force we are presented with is the A – B-flat rise, described above, from m.4-5. Like many of Liszt’s heavily chromatic late works, the half-step plays a crucial structural role. Both framing the small scale local progressions (A in m.4 – B-flat in m.5 – the final A in m.30) and the larger scale global progression (A in m.1 – B-flat in m.31 – A in m.43) we find an almost Beethovenian economy of means relegated at the level of pitch. Liszt is spelling augmented triads in the A section based on major thirds, and spelling a diminished triad in the B section based on minor thirds (B-flat m.31, D-flat m.35, E m.39) and then concluding with a resignation on the same augmented triad that began the piece, even echoing, in

retrograde, the opening gesture.<sup>22</sup> This is exactly the same procedure we saw in *La Lugubre Gondola I*; Liszt frames the work in augmented harmony, and here places the arguably more consonant or traditionally stable harmonies in the center. Think back to classical sonata form; in its most elemental stage, it is a movement from a stable tonic to an unstable dominant which inexorably resolves back to the same stable tonic it began with. Could Liszt be playing the same game and simply swapping the pre-established players? Could his experiments and explorations into the question of tonality be reversing or at least questioning our perceptions of stability, consonance, and “tonic” with the sudden rise of the augmented triad to the foreground as a sort of protagonist? Keep these questions in mind as we will later take yet another look at the issue of tonality, this time through the eyes of atonal set theory.<sup>23</sup> But first, worth mentioning is Liszt’s other 1883 elegy to Wagner, *Am Grabe Richard Wagners*.

The connection between the two pieces may at first seem to be in title/programmatic subject matter only. However, with further exploration we may find more topics of discussion to enrich our understanding of Liszt’s music during this painful time of his life.<sup>24</sup> The first and most evident connection is in the eight measure introduction; especially when the pieces are heard or played back to back, the clear pitch connection between the conclusion of *R.W. – Venezia* and the opening of *Am Grabe*

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<sup>22</sup> It is also worth noting, as a sidebar, the absence of a key signature for the first 30 measures of the piece and the sudden, almost defiant two-flat signature that coincides with the B-flat major harmony in m.31. While there is speculation on either side of the argument (it can be either a hidden, profound, and prophetic message or simply a notational tool used for ease of reading and nothing more), its quick cameo appearance does at least suggest a “key” while it is in effect.

<sup>23</sup> A basic understanding of the fundamental vocabulary and overall purpose of set theory would be useful in the following argument. For the purposes of concision, this essay will not offer such a “crash course” but will point the reader to Forte Structure for any desired further reading.

<sup>24</sup> Coincidentally, the manuscript for *Am Grabe Richard Wagners* dates three months after *R.W. – Venezia*, though there is considerable evidence that the music and the connective unity between the two pieces were in Liszt’s mind during this period.

*Richard Wagners* is evident:<sup>25</sup> “...from a musical standpoint, *Am Grabe* is inexorably linked to *R.W. Venezia*.”<sup>26</sup> There is also a similarity in this specific augmented triad’s tendency to “resolve” to B-flat, as was seen in the climactic m. 31 of *R.W. – Venezia* and is seen both in the initial agogic resolution from A to B-flat (m.2, *Am Grabe*) and the consequent measure’s arpeggiation of a (respelled) B-flat minor triad (Figure 7). Author and theorist David Cannata sums up the connection poetically: “Liszt had not avoided tonal closure in *R.W. Venezia*, he had merely postponed it – for three months.”<sup>27</sup> Further correspondences between the two pieces exist in the left hand pedal C-sharp octaves that pervade the first half of each composition, and the global projection of the loose tonal scheme (the basic A center – B-flat center – A center in *R.W. – Venezia* essentially summarized with the addition of the B-flat in the concluding measures; here in *Am Grabe* the final bell tones C-sharp, A-sharp, D-sharp, C-sharp perhaps echo the shift from the opening C-sharp based augmented triad into the A-sharp [B-flat] based “resolution,” onwards to the D-sharp infused major/minor progression beginning in m.9, and finally back to a relatively clear C-sharp major “tonic” to conclude the piece). The ending motive is actually reminiscent of the Bell leitmotif from Wagner’s own *Parsifal*, and Liszt was certainly bound to have such music in mind and intended the connection even on the subconscious level (Figure 8).

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<sup>25</sup> Liszt clearly opens *Am Grabe Richard Wagners* with the same F augmented triad infused with B-flat that ended *R.W. – Venezia*, in reverse order. It is as if the former piece resigned Wagner’s body downwards into the earth and the latter is raising his spirit upwards into the heavens.

<sup>26</sup> Cannata, *Perception & Apperception in Liszt's Late Piano Music*, 184.

<sup>27</sup> Cannata, *Perception & Apperception in Liszt's Late Piano Music*, 185.

Figure 7

AM GRABE RICHARD WAGNERS

Sehr langsam  $\text{♩} = 44$  F. Liszt, 22ten Mai, 83. Weimar

mf

p un poco marcato  
pp tremolo

6

Detailed description: This block contains two systems of musical notation for Figure 7. The first system covers measures 1 through 5, with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The second system covers measures 6 through 10, with dynamic markings of *p un poco marcato* and *pp tremolo*. The music is in a key with two sharps (D major) and common time. The tempo is marked 'Sehr langsam' with a quarter note equal to 44 beats per minute. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, rests, and various note values.

Figure 8

38 8

45 pp

50

Detailed description: This block contains three systems of musical notation for Figure 8. The first system covers measures 38 through 44, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a bracketed section of 8 notes. The second system covers measures 45 through 49, also with a dynamic marking of *pp*. The third system covers measures 50 through 54. The music is in a key with two sharps (D major) and common time. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, rests, and various note values.



## ***Unstern!* and ramifications of Set Theory**

Theorist and musicologist Allen Forte, who is perhaps best known for his work in establishing a standard “set theory” by which to analyze and understand structure in music, especially in the largely atonal music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, takes a great interest in Liszt’s contributions to, or at least his anticipations of, the “...new music that suddenly... appeared on the scene in 1908-09.”<sup>28</sup> He is able to offer a very unique authority and interpretation of many of Liszt’s “experimental” harmonic structures.<sup>29</sup> To tackle a new outlook, we will also tackle a new piece: Liszt’s radical *Unstern!* of 1880.<sup>30</sup>

A traditional look at nearly any passage in the first  $\frac{3}{4}$  of this piece will yield similar observations: an abundance of melodic tritones, formations of partial whole-tone scales, and, again, a prominence of the augmented triad as a foreground harmony. While these immediate observations are indeed correct, they do little to give us a sense of tonality or key/harmonic centrality; for this sense of apparently otherwise absent unity, we will turn to atonal set theory for guidance. The opening 5 notes (E, F, B, C, and F-sharp) contain some interesting properties (Figure 9). The five note theme is comprised of three interlocking 3-5 sets.<sup>31</sup> This same set, with the same order of the same pitches, resurfaces at the most climactic and dissonant moment of the piece as the stark left-hand

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<sup>28</sup> Forte, *Liszt's Experimental Idiom and Music of the Early Twentieth Century*, 209.

<sup>29</sup> It should first be noted that, even until the turn of the century, there are no records or implications that Liszt or other contemporary composers were actually aware of this system of pitch organization (such evidence is notably equally absent during Schoenberg’s early freely atonal music) and is therefore by definition a means of understanding the music as imposed from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>30</sup> The same piece is often and alternatively titled as *Unstern: Sinistre, disastro* or *Unstern! – Sinistre*.

<sup>31</sup> “3-5” is simply a designation for a trichord with the same interval content as the opening three notes, E, F, and B: the same 3-5 set designation applies to F, B, and C (the next note in the passage) as it is simply inverted around the central F-B tritone common to both sets. Furthermore, the next 3 notes (B, C, and F-sharp) also comprise a 3-5 set; while the order of intervals is different, the content of the overall structure is the same, specifically a half-step and a tritone within a perfect 5<sup>th</sup>.

fanfare of m.70-71 under clashing augmented chords in the treble.<sup>32</sup> While this may very well be a coincidence and Liszt is merely tonicizing the same local F root and happens to use the exact same pitches as he opened with, the evidence for a more structured and planned unity is quite strong.

Figure 9



To further this idea of structural unity, we will examine yet another set that pans out on several levels: the 4-19 set.<sup>33</sup> The first manifestation of this structure lies in m.21, taking each of the important notes on downbeats: G-sharp, E, C, and D-sharp (Figure 10). The same plays out in its subsequent transpositions; m.29, 37, and 41, each structure building itself around the 4-19 set. Its final vertical presentations occur, oddly enough, at m.70 along with the 3-5 set previously discussed<sup>34</sup> and through the “cadential” passage from m.77-83. However, as Forte points out, the more profound instance of this 4-19 structure is found on the macro level; By tracing each of the four structurally defining moments of the piece (pre-m.85) one is able to extrapolate the following 4-19 set: E (first note of the piece), G-sharp (subito forte octaves in m.21), C (climax and goal of the previous chromatic buildup in m.70) and C-sharp (the “pivot” note that launches us into

<sup>32</sup> Even the missing C is present here as a persistent octave in the right hand.

<sup>33</sup> The 4-19 set has the prime form (basic interval map) of (0, 1, 4, 8) and can be illustrated as a minor third and a major third separated by a half-step.

<sup>34</sup> The 4-19 set here is formed by the bass F and the treble C, E, and G-sharp.

the final chorale). Again, this may seem like a stretch to the traditional ear, but the evidence towards a subconscious or even unintentional organization scheme in Liszt's mind is present. Forte even goes so far as to cite this particular set as a staple in this new music: "Instances of 4-19 are to be found everywhere in the non-tonal music of the early twentieth century. Indeed, if there is a single harmony that is emblematic of that music it is 4-19."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Forte, *Liszt's Experimental Idiom and Music of the Early Twentieth Century*, 214.

Figure 10

Musical score for Figure 10, measures 18-25. The score is written for piano in two staves. Measure 18 is marked with a forte dynamic (f) and a slur. Measure 19 has a piano dynamic (p) and a slur. Measure 20 has a tenuto (ten.) marking. Measure 21 has a tenuto (ten.) marking. Measure 22 has a marcato marking. Measure 23 has a marcato marking. Measure 24 has a marcato marking. Measure 25 has a marcato marking. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

Figure 11

Musical score for Figure 11, measures 67-100. The score is written for piano in two staves. Measure 67 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 68 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 69 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 70 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 71 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 72 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 73 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 74 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 75 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 76 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 77 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 78 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 79 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 80 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 81 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 82 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 83 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 84 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 85 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 86 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 87 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 88 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 89 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 90 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 91 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 92 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 93 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 94 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 95 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 96 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 97 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 98 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 99 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). Measure 100 is marked with a forte dynamic (f). The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

### ***Nuage Gris*: an amalgamation of techniques**

Now that we have seen some of Liszt's harmonic adventures under several unique lights, it would perhaps be beneficial to employ these different analytical techniques and mindsets in tandem to better understand a single work, arguably the more famous, performed, and analyzed of Liszt's late piano works, the *Nuage Gris* of 1881. Do not let its brevity of form and simplicity of texture fool you; this short exploratory work has earned its place in the theory textbook hall of fame for good reason.

This is a popular work to analyze in Liszt's late output as it provides a sort of "cheat sheet" for many of the harmonic and textural devices Liszt would employ through the final years of his life (Figure 12). Without getting into an analysis of every note in the piece, several harmonic events merit discussion. The opening four measures enter as a pick-up in stark monody, a texture Liszt was increasingly fond of in his late years.<sup>36</sup> Although the skeletal harmony points towards G minor (the clear falling 5-3-1 in m.2 is unmistakable), so far we lack the necessary ingredients of a stable key center. Liszt does not help matters in m.9-20 as the bass B-flat oscillates to its lower neighbor A while undecorated augmented triads fall chromatically downwards by half-step. So far, we have seen all of these tricks before; the augmented triads seem to take the prominent harmonic role as the only vertical sonorities so far, and Liszt is conscious of their progression as he ends the sequence on the same triad he as he begins it with: D – F-sharp – B-flat. The rest of the piece, arguably, is simply a restatement of the first half with minor variations; the monadic opening now spans a much more narrow range (m.21-25)

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<sup>36</sup> Of course, Liszt, and likely every other composer before him, has used a single-line texture at some point (one does not make a scandal of every Bach fugue beginning in monody). However, the special use of the texture throughout most of the piano works in discussion here is worthy of note.

and the descending augmented chords now have a chromatic right hand line pulling upwards (m.33-44). By now, though, we should know better than to be satisfied with simplifying this music.

Figure 12

TRÜBE WOLKEN - NUAGES GRIS

The musical score is written for piano in a minor key (three flats) and common time (C). It consists of four systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The tempo is marked 'Andante' and the initial dynamic is 'p' (piano). The first system (measures 1-5) features a melodic line in the treble staff with slurs and a bass line with a few notes. The second system (measures 6-10) includes a 'tremolando' marking in the bass staff. The third system (measures 11-16) shows more complex textures with chords and slurs. The fourth system (measures 17-21) concludes with a melodic flourish in the treble staff and a final chord in the bass staff.

70

23

28

33

38

43

sempre legato

rall.

p

On the global harmonic scale, we have already discussed the (problematized) G minor tonic. While this is the certainly the most logical key center, without a traditional



V-I cadence or at least the existence of a root position tonic, this definition becomes fuzzy at best. But by remembering the new role of the augmented triad as an “androgynous” dominant in Liszt’s late period (D – F-sharp – B-flat [instead of A]), we can trace a very traditional harmonic progression throughout the piece: I (m.1), V (m.9), I (m.25), V (m.33), I (m.47).<sup>37</sup> By relaxing our rigid, classical definitions of tonic and dominant key areas and relations, *Nuage Gris* actually fits an extremely simple and straightforward tonal scheme.

On the more localized motivic scale, we can trace a similar current through the work. Taking the cue from the very noticeable C-sharp – D half-step from m.1-2, we are again faced with the most elemental interval of highly chromatic music. Here, the half-step plays out on the grand scale as well; realizing that the only pitch difference between our G minor tonic and our D – F-sharp – B-flat androgynous dominant is the half-step G to F-sharp, and taking note of the ominous B-flat – A tremolos in the bass at m.9, we see half-steps at all major layers of the piece’s construction, collecting to form the three notes of the G minor triad, each supported by 7-1 half step cadential motion.<sup>38</sup> Finally, the F-sharp – G is given special prominence at the piece’s conclusion, stretching upwards from m.33 through every note of the octave until m.44 where it, indeed, reaches a point of true cadence on the final high G in m.47. It’s the chord underneath this 7-1 resolution that is problematic. Skoumal points out “...since the crucial leading-note resolution [the F-sharp – G 7-1 that was just discussed] does end the piece, Liszt is free to retain other dissonances. His solution is ingenious in that it provides the necessary tonal closure and

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<sup>37</sup> Skoumal, *Liszt’s Androgynous Harmony*, 63.

<sup>38</sup> In case we missed it the first time through, Liszt reiterates these half-steps in the opening of the second half: C-sharp – D in m.21-22, F-sharp – G in m.27-28, and A – B-flat in m.31-32.

yet retains the aura of mystery that pervades the entire piece.” Forte agrees, further tracing a 4-19 set (the same we saw in *Unstern!*) in the melody that completes itself on the final G: “The ultimate destination of this motion, however, is high G, which completes the large-scale 4-19 in the upper voice: D-B<sup>b</sup>-B<sup>b</sup>-D-F<sup>#</sup>-G.”<sup>39</sup> Many even see the unexpected B natural as a sort of Picardy third to give an even deeper sense of conclusion and resolution at the end of the piece.

Is *Nuage Gris* tonal? Most would argue yes, citing the repetitive structure returning to the opening material in the second half, the frequent references to the G minor, and the large-scale oscillation between the relatively stable melodic areas and the blurry pseudo-dominant augmented progressions in between. However, even with this exceptional definition of a key center or tonality, it seems there are enough issues with it that we can be assured Liszt has no interest in appeasing the ears of the past in this music: “In *Nuage gris* Liszt approaches atonality by diluting the fundamental structure, but the many indications of tonality at levels nearer the surface prevent total dissolution of tonal forces, probably even at the level of overall coherence.”<sup>40</sup> To tackle the tonality question from yet another angle, we will next look at one of the last pieces the composer wrote for the piano, the *Bagatelle sans tonalite* of 1885.

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<sup>39</sup> Forte, *Liszt's Experimental Idiom and Music of the Early Twentieth Century*, 226.

<sup>40</sup> Baker, *The Limits of Tonality in the Late Music of Franz Liszt*, 155.

## The question of “tonality” and the Bagatelle without it

The title of this work, *Bagatelle sans tonalité*, can be misleading, suggesting a complete lack of tonal organization. Like the examples we have looked at previously, we will discuss the issue here from a variety of standpoints, gathering any useful information and utilizing organizational principles as they present themselves, and not limit our exploration by trying to “find the only right answer” with a single means of analysis.

As we have thus far focused mainly on vertical harmonies and their local/global inclinations towards a large-scale key scheme, we will now start our observations of the Bagatelle on a more melodic level. Yet another common feature of much of Liszt’s late compositions is his penchant for non-diatonic and exotic scales. Here, we see some clear instances of the octatonic collection, long before its heyday with Stravinsky, Bartok, and Webern.<sup>41</sup> The quirky introduction of m.1-12 is actually entirely contained in the same octatonic scale (OCT<sub>12</sub>) which is made especially clear in the scalar ascent in m.10-11; the stark B-F tritone of the opening gesture<sup>42</sup> and the G major triad of m.13 are also contained in the same collection (Figure 13). In fact, the only two missing notes from the complete scale are A-flat and B-flat; fast forward to the return of the introductory material at m.87 and notice what “key” Liszt modulates to this time: the triplet figure now, in m.95, begins on A-flat and B-flat, the two missing links to our opening octatonic scale (Figure 16). Likewise, in the cadenza passage of m.86, we can observe a more organic octatonic scale; clearly Liszt is arpeggiating the diminished seventh of A-flat, B, D, F between the hands (Figure 15). However, each group of four notes contains a

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<sup>41</sup> As with most “new innovations” in music, the octatonic has of course seen use much earlier; even in the music of Mozart, Scarlatti, and J.S. Bach.

<sup>42</sup> Consequently, we can recall the same E-B-F motive as the pervasive 3-5 set from the opening of *Unstern!*, even using the same pitches.

“wrong” note that does not belong in the central chord; these notes collect into a different diminished seventh chord, C-sharp, E, G, B-flat. Of course, this is the simplest way to build an octatonic scale, to superimpose two different diminished seventh harmonies on top of one another, which is exactly what Liszt does here to form the same OCT<sub>12</sub> of the opening, while still retaining the focal supremacy of the A-flat, B, D, F harmony. To further the global connection of this octatonic collection, observe how the piece ends with the closing cadenza beginning in m.177 (Figure 18). Despite the blatant chromatic saturation of diminished triads and sevenths in this passage, the grouping clearly emphasizes the very same harmony (this time, the A-flat is respelled as G-sharp) to conclude the piece with the same collection it began and used at its central point of climax.<sup>43</sup> While this may seem like a foreign means of analysis, we are already quite familiar with tracing scalar collections and their interactions as a basis for tonality; take any classical sonata form - we follow the progression from the tonic major/minor through various transitional changes (raised 7<sup>th</sup> in V to tonicize the dominant, etc.) into a new and unique collection, the secondary key area. True, most previous tonal music keeps strictly within diatonic collections, but we still define recapitulatory harmony by its relation (i.e. equivalence) to the opening tonic; this is exactly what Liszt is showing us here with the OCT<sub>12</sub> collection.

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<sup>43</sup> Berry, *The Meaning[s] of “Without”*: An Exploration of Liszt's *Bagatelle ohne Tonart*, 237.

Figure 13

4. MEPHISTO-WALZER  
Bagatelle ohne Tonart — Bagatelle, sans tonalité

Allegretto mosso  $\text{♩} = 160$

7

poco a poco dim.

p scherzando

14

Figure 14

33

38

Figure 15

86 quasi cadenza

m.s.

m.d.

p leggierissimo

8

Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Even with the global thread of the octatonic collection to guide our sense of “tonal” unity in the Bagatelle, there are still even more blatant features of the work to explore. Aside from the harmonic implications, the Bagatelle is relatively straightforward in terms of thematic material and structural organization. In its most basic sense, the piece is an extended binary form with introduction and coda material to frame each section. Within each of the two large halves, we have clearly distinct A material (m.13-36, m.95-118) and B material (m.37-56, m.119-148).<sup>44</sup> What is interesting about this system of organization, aside from its subtle, improvisatory textural variation, is its scheme of tonality, or at the very least pitch organization.

<sup>44</sup> Berry, *The Meaning[s] of “Without”*: An Exploration of Liszt's *Bagatelle ohne Tonart*, 234.

When the A material first appears, the melodic figure begins on F over a G major triad; the same configuration is true of its immediate repetition in m.25.<sup>45</sup> The B material spells out a D major scale downwards, resolving in a sense to the D augmented triad in m.38 (Figure 14). (Think of this passage without the A-sharps; it would be an almost completely typical functional harmonic progression.) What is of interest on the global scale is how Liszt deals with the same material in its restatement. We are greeted with the same (slightly abbreviated) introduction material in m.87, an exact pitch replica of m.5-10 in fact. However, m.95 takes an unexpected turn (to complete the octatonic set as mentioned above) launching into a melody centered around A-flat and a B<sup>0</sup> harmony behind it. For its subsequent repetition, it is as if Liszt attempts to “fix” overshooting this key center in m.107 but fails again, this time basing the melodic figure around E with an F-sharp major triad underneath. At this point, we should rightly be confused as to what Liszt is doing harmonically, while holding on to the familiar theme and texture from earlier. What happens at the return of the B material is what is remarkable; in m.119 Liszt essentially quotes, pitch-by-pitch, the same B material of m.37 in the same key as it was the first time (Figure 17).<sup>46</sup> The final coda continues in the same key/pitch level as the first half.

What happens here is harmonically and formally unique; Liszt essentially reverses the tonal axes of traditional sonata form convention. In most cyclical forms of classical music to this point, we expect our primary thematic material to be presented in the same key every time, (exposition vs. recapitulation in sonata form, rondo/variation form, etc.)

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<sup>45</sup> Avoidance of labeling these harmonies in conventional means is intentional; to call m.13 a G<sup>7</sup> would carry with it unwanted and, indeed, unwarranted functional connotations.

<sup>46</sup> The only difference in the second half of the piece is the B section is now an octave higher to coincide with the globally ascending register.

and for the secondary material to initially be “lost” and find its way “home” (i.e. tonic) by the end. Liszt presents the opposite scenario in an almost literary sense in the Bagatelle; it is the primary theme that is unsure of its tonic, its key center, its point of departure, and the secondary theme that is stable.<sup>47</sup> Like many of the observations we have made thus far, we do not have any authoritative decree from the composer as to his exact intentions, and it is entirely possible that many of these thoughts never went through Liszt’s head; what is of value is a system of understanding the new and the novel in this largely exploratory and experimental music, whether it can account for every note or just shed some valuable insight on a few otherwise invisible connections.

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<sup>47</sup> This juxtaposition is further made apparent by the constant variation in texture of the A theme (registral expansion in m.25, reversal of hands in m.95) while the B material is an exact copy simply transposed up an octave.



### **Chapter III. Implications on the future of music**

We have seen many angles of various new compositional techniques, harmonic devices, and structures of organization set forth by Liszt in his late piano works. As a reminder, this comprises an oeuvre that essentially stopped in 1885, decades before some of these very same “new and innovative” discoveries garnered 20<sup>th</sup> century composers with fame and notoriety. Keeping in mind the often experimental nature of Liszt’s various ventures into the unknown, we will now trace many of these same trends used by Liszt in the previous century as they resurface in the works of major 20<sup>th</sup> century composers.

## Second Viennese School – Passing the torch

To being with one of the most obvious connections to one of the most influential composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century seems fitting. Alban Berg's *Piano Sonata* Op.1 of 1910 is a rarity in the fact that in his first published opus, Berg was able to encapsulate so much of the refined and progressive vision of the Second Viennese School, and in a single movement no less. The Sonata consists of a single movement in the key of B minor<sup>48</sup> and is heavily influenced by Berg's (then) few years of study with Schoenberg. However, there is a distinct and unmistakable influence from a certain work of Liszt which we have already discussed.

First, we will study the opening of the Sonata, specifically from the first note to the cadence in the 3<sup>rd</sup> full measure (Figure 19). A few striking observations may come to mind immediately, not the least being that the suggested key center of B minor only becomes apparent directly preceding the aforementioned cadence. A further glance over the rest of the page can easily confirm that the "tonality" of this piece has departed from the traditional functional sense of the word. But a careful listen through the same music doesn't quite throw the ear into complete disarray and suggest atonality. How does Berg achieve this balance?

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<sup>48</sup> Aside from the title, the implications to a connection with Liszt's own *Piano Sonata* are worth noting: both pieces consist of a single large-scale movement, both are built off of small motivic cells, both employ heavy and extensive development of a very small economy of material ("developing variation" in Berg's case, at least, and both pieces are in B minor yet begin on a G and end with a similar 2<sup>nd</sup> inversion B chord (Liszt: major, Berg: minor) in the high register of the keyboard and a low B octave.

Figure 19

**SONATE.**

Alban Berg, Op. 1.

Actually, we can attribute many of the harmonic devices he is using to expand the traditional sense of tonality to Liszt. Look back to the very opening gesture’s melody, this time reminding yourself of the opening single-note gesture from *Nuage Gris*. In fact, Berg’s melody is a direct transposition of Liszt’s until the 2<sup>nd</sup> full measure of music. The stark monody that plunged us into the mystery of *Nuage Gris* is the same that opens the curtains of Berg’s tapestry. Furthermore, tracing the contour of the subsequent phrases in the right hand brings to light several sequences of outlined augmented triads (mm.3-4, mm.5-6) which we have also discussed at great length regarding its use in Liszt’s hands:<sup>49</sup> “In his Op.1, Berg... clearly does not regard the augmented triad as a dissonance requiring a fixed resolution, but as a self-standing sonority.”<sup>50</sup> Berg employs the

<sup>49</sup> Further instances of prominent use of the augmented triad occur in the *ffff* climax at the center of the movement as well as nearly every occurrence of a dynamic of *ff* or higher.

<sup>50</sup> Forte, *Alban Berg’s Piano Sonata, Op. 1: A Landmark In Early Twentieth-Century Music*, 8.

harmony to eschew our sense of function while enhancing our sense of melody and harmonic color. The overall question of tonality may well enough be applied here (as we applied it to the Bagatelle earlier) but in this sense, traditional key centers seem to be a point of departure into a vastly expanded harmonic language which explores highly chromatic horizontal progression, quartal arpeggiations of vertical harmonies, and most prominently the frequent use of the augmented triad to suspend our sense of stability in key moments throughout the entire Sonata.

## Impression on the Impressionists

While Liszt arguably had the greatest influence and impact on the Austrians of the Second Viennese School, some of the seeds he sowed in his later years were cultivated on French soil. Many of Liszt's textural and less austere harmonic ventures had a great impact on the Impressionist composers for the piano, most notably Debussy and Ravel. Perhaps stemming from Liszt's foray into the religious life of solitude and contemplation, much of the music he wrote into his final years actually stayed quite functional and pleasant, as much as the majority of this document would have you think otherwise! The tender *Resignazione* of 1881 (despite its strange ending), the *En Rêve* nocturne of 1885, and the various religious works dating from this period show that he still had a firm grasp on tradition, tonality, and euphonic beauty. Even the entirely tonal central section of the *Lugubre Gondola II* has an aura of foreshadowing towards the impressionists.

But one of the most cited influential works was Liszt's *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* from the 3<sup>rd</sup> book of *Années de pèlerinage*. Its sparkling arpeggiated and tremolando textures with constant shimmering trills and harmonic explorations of expanded 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> chords served as a springboard for much of the impressionists' work with color, light, and texture (Figure 20). A few specific pieces in the impressionist repertoire warrant mention. Debussy's virtuosic *L'isle joyeuse* explores several techniques we have seen in Liszt so far. First, the ubiquitous opening trill unravels into a quick cascade of, you guessed it, parallel augmented triads, which of course combine into a whole tone collection that Debussy made extensive use of throughout his life (Figure 22). However, the use of the harmony to avoid a sense of tonic here is very much in line with Liszt's use of it in his own music. But speaking specifically on the *Jeux d'eaux*'s

influence, Debussy's left hand accompaniment figure in m.7 (Figure 23) is directly reminiscent of Liszt's left hand figure in m.44 (Figure 21). Also linked to Liszt's fountain piece is Ravel's own *Jeux d'eau* of 1901. The shimmering texture of cascading right hand arpeggios and open 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> intervals in the left hand, the light "raindrop" dyads over a predominantly pentatonic melody, all harken back to Liszt with a scintillating virtuosity in true "romantic" fashion (Figure 24).<sup>51</sup>

Figure 20



Figure 21



<sup>51</sup> Kaminsky, *Unmasking Ravel: New Perspectives on the Music*, 272.

Figure 22

### L'isle joyeuse

Quasi una cadenza

PIANO



Figure 23

7 Tempo: Modéré et très souple



Figure 24



## **Chapter IV. Conclusions**

We have looked at many of the solo piano pieces composed in the last years of Franz Liszt's life and discussed many of the novel, interesting, experimental, and influential devices he made use of in this time. We have explored his employment of the augmented triad to confuse our sense of key center and stability and how he often utilized such "dissonant" harmonies in the place of the tonic in traditional tonal harmonic forms. We have talked about his use of exotic collections (octatonic/modal scales) in exploring new horizons in melody and harmony stemming from a departure from the diatonic. We have even illustrated connections to methods of analysis that would not be discovered for decades which fascinatingly find solace in some of his most forward-thinking works. We have garnered an understanding of how his various branches of thought and musical experiments come together into a crystallized whole and studied the impact that has on our sense of style and tonality, and how even in these then uncharted waters he is able to maintain the integrity and fire of his youth. Finally, we have taken a brief look into the musical world decades after his death and found corollaries in the music of the Second Viennese School as well as influence on the Impressionist composers.

But were we able to discover anything pointing to Liszt's role as a "prophet" of new music? Perhaps we would find a more accurate picture by evoking an image of the old monk with his generous hands outstretched and his purse pouring out to the poor. Liszt succeeded in philanthropy in more than the financial sense; his contributions and donations to music are still seen today, over a century after his death. His freely admitted



thoughts, ideas, directions, concepts, and theories, while perhaps underdeveloped and unexplored even in his own life, have contributed to setting the stage for so many ventures in compositional style that would happen decades after he introduced them. It is as if his vision was to scatter seeds wherever his arm could reach and hope that a few of them would develop into a healthy crop. In many ways, we have Liszt to thank for so many of the “new” sounds and concepts that were introduced in the early 1900s. One can only hope that with continued and renewed interest, openness, and exposure to the music of his last years, we can learn to appreciate the immense wealth of foresight and stark beauty he had to offer. While the music of his final years may not be as accessible or popular as the virtuosity of his youth, the incredibly imaginative, challenging, and powerful music of Liszt’s late years is still most certainly worthy of study, performance, and an open minded listen.

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