

Prelude

“Inside Masterworks”



HARTFORD
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

LISTENING IN COLOR

MARCH 2017

Masterworks #6: A Faust Symphony March 10-12, 2017

Question: Who was the first musical superstar whose radiating sensuality prompted masses of adoring female fans to hurl their clothing onto the stage?

Answer: Franz Liszt!



Franz Liszt is best known as a composer, but in his lifetime, Liszt was truly the first “rock star” capable of filling a hall to capacity without benefit of an orchestra. As a child, Liszt achieved fame as a prodigy; as an adult, he was the first pianist to take center stage for an entire evening, in a solo performance to an enraptured audience, whose fan worship was unlike anything the world had known.ⁱ

Long before Elvis Presley or the Beatles inspired screaming teenagers in concerts, Liszt generated “star mania,” causing adoring female fans to keep his discarded cigar butts nestled in their cleavage,ⁱⁱ or fight for possession of his gloves, “carelessly” left on a piano stool after a performance.ⁱⁱⁱ In the 1840s, Liszt, with his long flowing hair and romantic affectations, was every woman’s dream and he milked it for all it was worth.^{iv}



In 1844, the German poet Heinrich Heine dubbed this extraordinary phenomenon “Lisztomania.”^v Women forcibly attempted to obtain cuttings from his clothing or his hair; broken strings from the pianos he played were made into bracelets and the dregs of his tea were emptied into scent bottles.^{vi} He was too popular to go out on foot, and his passport, in lieu of a physical description, merely said, “Celebritate sua sat notus”: sufficiently well-known through celebrity.^{vii}

During his concert career, he was the most highly-paid artist of his day and was the first pianist able to support himself on his earnings as a performer.^{viii} His extraordinarily high earnings gave him the financial means to retire from public performance at the relatively young age of 35, devoting the rest of his life to composition.^{ix}

Liszt, born October 22, 1811 in Hungary, also lived the lifestyle of a rock star. Had he lived today, his passionate romances with various women might well be fodder for tabloid journals. In 1833, through his friendship with Frederic Chopin and George Sand, a 22-year-old Liszt met and fell madly in love with Countess Marie d’Agoult, a married woman of 28. Within a year, Marie’s adoration of Liszt was so consuming that she decided to leave her husband and family to live with Franz full-time in Switzerland.^x The couple’s first daughter, Blandine, was born in Geneva in December of that same year.^{xi} Franz

Masterworks #6:

Question: Who was the first musical superstar whose radiating sensuality prompted masses of adoring female fans to hurl their clothing onto the stage? **Answer:** Franz Liszt!



Franz Liszt and Countess Marie d'Agoult.

and Marie had two more children, a daughter Cosima (born in 1837) and a son, Daniel (born in 1839), but by the end of the year, the relationship cooled and they separated.^{xii} Marie returned to Paris with the children, while Liszt spent the next eight years traveling through Europe and Russia on a concert tour.^{xiii} Predictably, while on tour, Liszt had multiple scandalous affairs with some of the leading female personalities of the day.^{xiv} In 1847, while performing in Kiev, Liszt met the princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, who was so enraptured with Liszt that she, like Marie, left her husband to be with him.^{xv} It was Carolyne who persuaded Liszt to leave the concert stage.^{xvi} Although unable to obtain a divorce from her husband, the princess moved with Liszt to a home he bought in Weimar, Germany, where he settled down to compose and teach.^{xvii}

Beyond his superstar status and celebrity lifestyle, Liszt's contributions to music, performance and the piano repertoire are also legendary. In fact, Liszt's life was a series of "firsts." Before Liszt, pianists performed just one item on a mixed program of many types of music.^{xviii} Because of Liszt, piano performance was forever altered: he created the concept of a piano recital with the pianist as the star.^{xix} He understood that playing the piano for an entire evening in front of a large audience was a theatrical event: he habitually placed the piano in deliberate profile to the audience so they could see his face.^{xx} He was the first performer to enter from the wings of the concert hall and take his seat at the piano.^{xxi} Everything we know about the modern recital, Liszt did first. Even the word "recital" was his invention.^{xxii}

In earlier times, composers played their own music or it didn't get performed; Liszt broke tradition by habitually programming music by other composers in his concerts, performing the music of his contemporaries that included Berlioz and Chopin.^{xxiii} It was Liszt who first transcribed orchestral works for solo piano. His most famous transcriptions include Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, the music of Bach and Schubert, as well as all of the nine Beethoven symphonies. He performed the works in concert at a time when the pieces were insufficiently appreciated, introducing the music to audiences who might never have otherwise heard that music at all, as phonographs did not yet exist.^{xxiv}

After hearing the violin virtuoso Nicolai Paganini perform, Liszt resolved to transfer the virtuoso pyrotechnics to piano, achieving for piano what Paganini had done for violin a generation earlier.^{xxv} Liszt's compositions for piano were incredibly difficult – and at the time, it was music that only he was capable of playing.^{xxvi} He became the first and greatest piano virtuoso of his time.

And there were more "firsts." Before Liszt, a conductor was someone who simply facilitated the performance, keeping time for the group. Because of Liszt, the conductor became someone who shaped the music intensely, playing the entire orchestra as an instrument.^{xxvii} Liszt pioneered the idea of the conductor as performer, raising the baton to conduct the compositions of others, beyond his own works.^{xxviii} For example, Liszt conducted compositions by Russian composer Aleksander Borodin, introducing the music to a far wider audience.^{xxix}

Liszt created the tradition of performing an entire evening of music from memory. Until Liszt, playing without a score was unheard of, and was believed to be disrespectful to the composer, as if the performer were merely improvising.^{xxx}

Liszt invented the modern "master class," luring students from all over the world to his rooms in Weimar.^{xxxi} His master classes consisted of 10 to 20 male and female students at a time, each performing

Masterworks #6:

Question: Who was the first musical superstar whose radiating sensuality prompted masses of adoring female fans to hurl their clothing onto the stage? **Answer:** Franz Liszt!

pieces they'd practiced. The maestro would offer advice, believing that communicating emotion and the character of the piece was of the utmost importance.^{xxxii} Most notably, all of Liszt's teaching was done for free.^{xxxiii}

Liszt is credited with the invention of the symphonic poem or tone poem, a piece for orchestra that tells a story or depicts an idea.^{xxxiv} **A Faust Symphony**, which some categorize as the forerunner to Liszt's 12 symphonic poems, will be performed by the Hartford Symphony Orchestra on **March 10 - 12, 2017**. We warmly invite you to join us for an original theatrical presentation specifically written for the HSO's performance of this remarkable orchestral music, with theatrical elements befitting a composition by the world's first "superstar."

Sponsored by The Saunders Fund for Innovative Programming

Masterworks Series Sponsor



Masterworks Pre-Concert Talk Sponsor



The return of Casey's Classics

Recommended recordings for your listening pleasure!

Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program?

Coleman Casey, HSO's dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers the following recommendations for recordings of selections featured on our upcoming Masterworks Concert:

Liszt's rarely performed but historically important *A Faust Symphony* has never been more compellingly interpreted or beautifully performed than by Leonard Bernstein and the Boston Symphony (DG).

Wondering How the Music Will Sound?

Please try HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE below, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage!

To hear and watch Leonard Bernstein conduct the Boston Symphony Orchestra, enjoy this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le8Bdl8C-E>

- i <https://www.theguardian.com/msic/2010/dec/27/liszt-200th-anniversary>. Stephen Hough
- ii Ibid
- iii <https://hubpages.com/entertainment/Franz-Liszt-Great-Composer-Great-Lover-great-Man-Not-Wikipedia-or-Facebook>
- iv Ibid
- v <https://www.cmuse.org/lisztomania-how-franz-liszt-became-music-first-panty-dropper/>
- vi Ibid
- vii Ibid
- viii <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/music-history-composers-and-performers-biographies/franz-liszt>
- ix <https://hubpages.com/entertainment/Franz-Liszt-Great-Composer-Great-Lover-great-Man-Not-Wikipedia-or-Facebook>
- x <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Franz-Liszt>
- xi Ibid
- xii Ibid
- xiii Ibid
- xiv <http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/liszt.php>
- xv <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/music-history-composers-and-performers-biographies/franz-liszt>
- xvi <http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/liszt.php>
- xvii <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/music-history-composers-and-performers-biographies/franz-liszt>
- xviii <https://www.theguardian.com/msic/2010/dec/27/liszt-200th-anniversary>. Stephen Hough
- xix Ibid
- xx <http://www.npr.org/2011/10/22/141617637/how-franz-liszt-became-the-worlds-first-rock-star>
- xxi Ibid
- xxii Ibid
- xxiii <https://www.theguardian.com/msic/2010/dec/27/liszt-200th-anniversary>. Stephen Hough
- xxiv <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Franz-Liszt>
- xxv <http://www.npr.org/2011/10/22/141617637/how-franz-liszt-became-the-worlds-first-rock-star>
- xxvi Ibid
- xxvii Ibid
- xxviii <https://www.theguardian.com/msic/2010/dec/27/liszt-200th-anniversary>. Stephen Hough
- xxix <http://www.classicfm.com/composers/borodin/>
- xxx <https://www.theguardian.com/msic/2010/dec/27/liszt-200th-anniversary>. Stephen Hough <http://study.com/academy/lesson/franz-liszt-biography-music-facts.html>
- xxxi <https://www.theguardian.com/msic/2010/dec/27/liszt-200th-anniversary>. Stephen Hough
- xxxii <http://lisztomania.wikidot.com/liszt-as-teacher>
- xxxiii Ibid
- xxxiv <http://study.com/academy/lesson/franz-liszt-biography-music-facts.html>