

LISZT AND THE ASSOCIATED ARTS



Over the past three years commemorating musicians has given the National Széchényi Library a chance to introduce its documents concerning music to an ever greater public. In 2009 the chamber exhibition *Seven Times Haydn*, held in the NSZL Relic Space, and the large-scale event *Joseph Haydn and Hungary*, organised jointly with the Museum of Music History in the building of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, celebrated the 200th anniversary of Joseph Haydn's death, who was in the Esterházy family's service for decades and was thus regarded as an honorary Hungarian himself. Last year, we commemorated the bicentenary of Ferenc Liszt's birth with the *Opera and Nation* exhibition overviewing the music and theatre of 19th century Hungary and by opening the continuously growing erkel.oszk.hu web site. Cooperating with the Museum of Music History again, this year the 200th anniversary of Ferenc Liszt's birth was remembered in the *Liszt and the Associated Arts* exhibition, concerned not only with the composer's life and work, but also reflecting the characteristic interaction of various arts in the Romantic period (clearly visible in Liszt's compositions).

Looking back at these three major exhibitions in the Museum of Music History, we are pleased to note that the preparatory work was getting smoother each year. Naturally, in all three cases the main contributor on the NSZL side was the Music Collection, but colleagues in the Theatre Collection furnished the room for *Haydn and Hungary* about opera at Eszterháza and had a decisive role in the overall execution of *Opera and Nation*. As literature had an outstanding place in Liszt's life, in 2011 a large number of items from the core collection were on display. The unique value of the three events was perhaps the fact that the Museum of Music History did not show sources selected from the national library's rich collection in isolation, but they fitted organically into the cultural environment evoked by the large number of contemporary statues, paintings, coins, jewels and musical instruments.

The chief curator of the Liszt exhibition was Mária Eckhardt, Academic Director of the Liszt Museum and Research Centre, who was made a life member of the National Széchényi Library in November 2011. Her concept was that the first room should take stock of the cultural experiences defining the young Liszt's education. The visitor saw the child Liszt's mostly religious readings and a complete Parisian living room

set with a genuine Erard piano exuding the air of the Paris literary salon of the 1820s and 30s, which opened up new worlds to the young composer. Finally, there are a number of contemporary cuts and paintings of breathtaking sceneries that carried away the young musician, who eloped to Switzerland with Countess Marie d'Agoult.

As the introductory text on the banner points out, Liszt was the first "to set to music" actual works of art rather than scenes of nature or literary works. An especially nice example of this is presented in the second room, where among others we have the Italian pieces of *A Traveller's Album (Album d'un voyageur)*. Entering the double-winged door, we immediately set eyes on a large reproduction of Raffaello's famous *Ecstasy of Saint Cecilia*, while the banner gives the composer's own analysis of the painting and the showcases display the various musical sources of Liszt's *Legend of Saint Cecilia*. Further showcases recall several later ecclesiastical pieces, while the representations of Italy on the walls, including paintings by Miklós Barabás and Károly Libay, reveal that the experience so important for Liszt was general in his age: the grand tour of lands with antique ruins was part of most artists' formative years (practically irrespective of their creative genres).

The third room is in fact a passageway whose walls were filled with Liszt's 'faces and masks': copies of pictures where a figure is modelled on the composer, a few cover pages and parts of key novels where Liszt appears either as a literary cameo or as the more or less hidden model for a character.

The small passageway leads to the fourth and largest room overviewing Liszt's symphonic program music. His contemporaries were rather puzzled when the world famous pianist suddenly gave up his virtuoso career and settled in Weimar in order to devote his time to organising culture and composing music at the head of the court theatre – in a sense following in Goethe's footsteps. The good decade spent in Germany's 'literary capital' almost inevitably became Liszt's period of experimenting with new possibilities for connecting music and associated arts: The *Dante* and the *Faust Symphonies* and especially the symphonic pieces made a huge impact on contemporaries and later generations of composers. In addition to highlighting the primary inspirational sources of these compositions, the exhibition also shows the works of



The Paris salon

Documents reflecting the close connection between Liszt and the Zichy family associated arts drawing on the same inspirations: Gustav Doré's cuts for the *Divina Comedia*, Mihály Zichy's *Faust series* or Delacroix's *Hamlet illustrations* shed new light on Liszt's own personal interpretations.

At the farther end of the room, Mihály Munkácsy's famous Liszt portrait attracts attention – the more so because the two artists were friends and the composer dedicated one of his late Hungarian rhapsodies, the 16th, to Munkácsy.

The portrait leads to the fifth room, which maps out Liszt's Hungarian contacts in more detail. After his well remembered January 1840 Pest concerts, he regularly came back to Hungary, from the early 1870s even maintaining a permanent home in the capital. Thus he met almost all the eminent figures of culture and politics, from Miklós Barabás, Ede Reményi, Mór Jókai, József Eötvös and László Teleki to Albert Apponyi. These encounters had a strong influence on several of Liszt's compositions, as the characteristic elements of the Gypsy-Hungarian musical idiom are present not only in his folk-inspired works. The room also gives a good review of the Hungarian reception of



Liszt's volume in the late 1850s *About the Gypsy and Gypsy Music in Hungary* (originally in French), as its main argument that Hungarian music is in fact Gypsy music almost irrevocably damaged his relationship with leading Hungarian personalities.

The sixth room, smaller again, is divided into two parts: one part presents the lyricists who wrote the words of Liszt's songs, melodramas and choruses, while the other offers the numerous extant cartoons of the musician. The next room offers a glimpse of the comprehensive editions of the musician's full oeuvre, rightly emphasizing with pride that the current *New Liszt Edition* is just being prepared by Editio Musica in Budapest. The walls of the eighth or last room are covered by 16 tableaux of the anniversary poster exhibition (and in part

featuring documents from the National Széchényi Library) also managed by Mária Eckhardt; based on advance booking, groups of visitors may watch film excerpts about Liszt on the screen here.

Thus, the 2011 *Liszt and the Associated Arts* exhibition is the prestigious highlight of the fruitful cooperation between the Museum of Music History and the National Széchényi Library of recent years. After its closure in August 2012, and after the bicentenary celebrations of the three great musicians, the rooms will be given back to the museum's own permanent exhibitions. Nevertheless, when staging future displays of a different, non-cooperative character, the staff of both the museum and the national library will definitely benefit from the experience gained in the parallel display of library documents and associated art work.

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