

Liszt, Franz: F. Chopin (1852)

Liszt met Chopin as soon as the latter arrived in Paris in 1831. Strong personal and artistic bonds quickly grew between the two musicians, although they later grew apart with the passage of time. They often spent time together in Paris and in the home of George Sand in Nohant. Chopin dedicated his opus 10 *Études* to Liszt, who was a lifelong devotee to his colleague's compositions. In 1841 Liszt wrote about Chopin's 26 April 1841 concert for the *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* ("[Concert de Chopin](#)"). Not long after Chopin's death in 1849, Liszt began planning to write his biography. On 14 November 1849, he sent Chopin's older sister Ludwika a list of questions intended to "give this work all the accuracy it requires".

Liszt's book, *F. Chopin*, first appeared between 9 February and 17 August 1851 as a serial column for *La France musicale*, a publication of the Escudier brothers. From the beginning of the year, the issue of 5 January announced this "very important book" under the title *La vie de Chopin*. A week later, on 12 January, the first installment was postponed and announced with a new title, *Études biographiques — F. Chopin*. However, the first installment was further delayed and replaced by Liszt's text on John Field, "pending publication of an important piece on Chopin, our readers will read with keen interest a study by F. Liszt [*sic*] on John Field," *Étude biographique* (19 January). The similarity between the titles *Études biographiques*, in the same publication and during the same period reinforced artistic parallels between Field and Chopin.

With the fourth installment on 2 March, the editors wrote that they had received many congratulatory letters, and after the sixth, on 23 March, they announced that publication had been suspended due to the number of current events. It might be that this pause was made as part of an advertising campaign to renew subscriptions. The columns were reprinted by several European magazines (according to the editors' announcements of 23 March and the correspondence of the Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein from April 1851). On 18 May, the magazine announced that subscribers would receive a piano album with six *Nocturnes* by Field edited and corrected by Liszt. The seventeenth and final installment was published on 17 August. On 28 December, one could read that "the attractive in-8 volume on satin vellum paper, **F. CHOPIN** by **F. LISZT**, is due to appear on 1 January." A special edition was reserved was sold at 5 francs but given free to new subscribers. "This publication will certainly make a mark on music history," announced the columns of *La France musicale*.

Liszt's book is divided into eight chapters, which later received titles in the edition of 1879 (see below). They recount the main events of Chopin's life, particularly his youth and his final days. Liszt often cites Polish poets Adam Mickiewicz and Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz and insists on the importance of Poland for Chopin's music (poetry, traditional dances, the "Zal" or nostalgic soul of Poland). "Chopin may be

ranked among the first musicians who have individualized the poetic sense of a nation in themselves.” He gives particular attention to the *Polonaises* and *Mazurkas*, which are the object of two chapters at the beginning of the volume, mentioning other works in passing, (such as the *Préludes* which he would edit for Breitkopf & Härtel in parallel with the new edition of his biographical essay in 1879). Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger has underlined the symmetry of the title “F. Chopin by F. Liszt”, pointing the elements of a sort of double-barreled homage that allowed Liszt to differentiate himself from Chopin. Although Liszt wrote in the edition of 1852 that he did not admire the late works as much as the “miniatures”, he later admitted to a change of heart and said that he admired Chopin’s entire production. (That Liszt preferred the miniatures to the large forms nevertheless became a trope of nineteenth century Chopin reception). Liszt sought to emphasize the poetry and unique style of Chopin’s music, linking it to Chopin’s individuality: “He bared his soul in his compositions as others do in prayer: pouring into them all the effusions of his heart, the unexpressed sorrows and unspeakable regrets, that pious souls pour into their conversations with God.”

Liszt wrote his book on Chopin with the active collaboration of the Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein, as can be seen in unpublished letters Weimar (Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv). While Liszt was in Weimar and the princess in Eilsen, she was responsible for copying and correcting Liszt’s texts, which she sometimes modified. For example, on 10 April, she wrote to Liszt, “I spent all day yesterday and this morning copying your polonaises [...]. I only made a few grammatical changes that are insignificant for you. As you wanted, I added an allusion to Byron’s poem *The Dream* in *Rève poëme*, with a few lines of filler on Chopin because, according to Weber, he arrived in a somewhat foreshortened manner for the *hero* of the narrative, as Oulibicheff said. Anyway, you’ll see it all in the proofs for the book and change it if you don’t like it — but it is as innocent as a bit of wadding to make a suit fit better.” The princess also corrected the book proofs. Still, Liszt’s authorship should not be doubted, as a 23-page manuscript in Liszt’s hand is held in a private collection). The version of 1852 is closer to what Liszt himself wrote; he surely had less control on the following editions and revisions.

Indeed, after its first edition and during Liszt’s lifetime, the book underwent several editions in French and German: a German translation of 1855 was printed in Cassel (Ernst Balde) in the first volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften*, an important revision in French appeared in Leipzig in 1879 (Breitkopf & Härtel), a German translation was published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1880 under the title *Fr. Chopin’s Individualität* (a free translation by La Mara) for the *Gesammelte Schriften*, and finally, in 1882, there was a new French edition with Breitkopf and Härtel.

Among all of Liszt’s writings, *F. Chopin* is perhaps the work that was the most often republished. In 1947, the edition Corrêa with a preface by Alfred Cortot, which is often referred to, was announced as the 32nd.

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Trans. Chris Murray

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1. Caractère général des œuvres de Chopin
2. Polonaises
3. Mazoures
4. Virtuosité de Chopin
5. Individualité de Chopin
6. Jeunesse de Chopin
7. Lelia
8. Derniers temps, derniers instants

Further reading

Mária Eckhardt, "New Documents on Liszt as Author", dans *New Hungarian Quarterly* », XXV (1984), p. 1-14.

Mária Eckhardt, "Liszt's contribution to the Breitkopf Chopin edition", dans: *New Light on Liszt and his Music. Essays in honour of Alan Walker's 65th Birthday*, dir. Michael Saffle et James Deaville, Franz Liszt Studies 6, Stuyvesant, Pendragon, 1997, pp. 167-180.

Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, "F. Chopin par F. Liszt : *un hommage à double entente*", in *Liszt et la France, musique, culture et société dans l'Europe du XIXe siècle*, dir. Malou Haine, Nicolas Dufetel, Jonatha Kregor et Dana Gooley, Paris, Vrin, 2012, p. 201-228.

Nicolas Dufetel, "Franz Liszt et Laura Rappoldi-Kahrer face aux Préludes de Chopin. Enjeux esthétiques et philologiques", dans *Chopin. Ideas - Interpretations - Influence*, dir. Irena Poniatowska, Varsovie, Institut national Frédéric Chopin, 2017, p. 75-104.

Nicolas Dufetel, "Les écrits de Franz Liszt. Quelques réflexions épistémologiques et méthodologiques sur leur paternité et leur typologie", dans *Ecrits de compositeurs (1850-2000). Une autorité en questions*, dir. Michel Duchesneau, Valérie Dufour et Marie-Hélène Benoit-Otis, Paris, Vrin, 2013, p. 265-287.

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