

THESES OF DLA DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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**THE UNJUSTLY FORGOTTEN CONTEMPORARIES OF FRANZ
LISZT**

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I. Research Antecedents

The work of Franz Liszt has been covered extensively by a number of music historians and biographers, however, a few have dealt or continue to deal with the bodies of work of his contemporaries. When performing my preliminary research, I was surprised to discover how little Hungarian language literature there is on composers and once-renowned performers such as Henri Herz, one of the most famous pianists of the 19th century; Alexander Dreyschock, a virtuoso famed for his octaves; Friedrich Kalkbrenner, the well-off pianist idolised by Chopin and considered the premier pianist of Europe or Sigismund Thalberg, famous for being Liszt's rival, who at one point almost managed to overshadow Liszt's fame. In my dissertation, I was first and foremost looking to uncover why the works of pianist-composers of the Paris of the 1830-s do not feature in the repertoire of today's pianists, and, furthermore, I also attempted to reveal the secret of Liszt's success—unbroken to this day—and the modern-day lack of success of his peers.

II. Sources

The primary source used for the present dissertation was the first volume of Alan Walker's monumental Liszt biography, which covers the composer's virtuoso years from 1811 to 1847. The book provides a detailed account of Paris in the 1830-s, as well the 'riot of pianists' and the age of virtuosos and uninhibited fantasies. Also of great assistance was the dissertation of my consultant, András Batta entitled "From Improvisation to Symphonic Poems". András Batta's work allows us to follow the changes and development of Franz Liszt's piano playing and composing activity, from the Viennese 'brilliant' school to his grand pieces.

Furthermore, I would also like to indicate as primary sources the sheet music for the works I have analysed in my dissertation.

These works are the following:

Henri Herz: *Variazioni Brillanti sul rondo finale della Cenerentola di Rossini Op.60.*

Friedrich Kalkbrenner: *Variations Brillantes sur une Mazourka de Chopin Op.120*

Alexander Dreyschock: *Piano Concerto in D minor Op.137*

Verdi-Thalberg: *Il Trovatore Fantaisie de Concert*

Verdi-Liszt: *Miserere du Trovatore*

Hexameron, *Variations on the theme of Bellini's opera I puritani*

Besides music encyclopaediae, I also found contemporary reviews—some of which can be found in Alan Walker’s book—as well as quotes from Chopin’s letters and Schumann’s critiques highly useful as secondary sources.

Moreover, I have also used the following works as further sources:

Gát József, *A Zongora története*, Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, Budapest, 1964

Robert Schumann *Forschungen*, Volume 6, Robert Schumann und die Französische Romantik, Schott, 1997

Ted Szulc, *Chopin Párizsban*, Európa könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1999

Hamburger Klára, *Liszt Ferenc Zenéje*, Balassi kiadó, 2010

III. Method

My dissertation aims to highlight that the fading of these once-shining stars into oblivion was undeserved or in certain cases indeed merited. Unfortunately, there are no recordings that give testament to their actual performances, therefore, I will try to examine and uncover the characteristics of their performing and of course composing styles through the analysis of their works, as well as providing a brief description of their respective lives and careers.

IV. Results

I opted for the presentation of Liszt’s forgotten contemporaries as the topic of my dissertation, on the one hand, because I was interested in why and how Liszt’s piano playing stood out from that of other artists of the era. I have attempted to analyse their works primarily as a pianist, from a piano technique aspect. I was interested in what piano technique elements and innovations Liszt’s contemporaries employed, and I also attempted to provide a comparison of their composing activities.

V. Documentation of the Activities Related to the Topic of the Dissertation

I have managed to gain considerable experience during the Liszt Memorial Year, primarily in Weimar, Germany; and the concert requests to play several of the works of Liszt’s contemporaries were also of great help.¹ This allowed me to gain not only theoretical, but

¹ I performed *Hexameron* on 26 June 2011 in Weimar and have recorded the *Verdi-Liszt: Trovatore* paraphrase—which I have also analysed—in 2008 for the Warner Classics company.

practical experience as well and was thus able to better recognise the similarities and differences found in the works of Liszt and his contemporaries.