

FRANZ LISZT

(1811-1886)

Années de pèlerinage (complete)

with Les Cloches de G***** and Venezia e Napoli

Jerome Lowenthal, piano

Weinachtsbaum, Heft II & III

Jerome Lowenthal, piano

Carmel Lowenthal, piano

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- 2) I. Chapelle de Guillaume Tell [4:53]
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ANNÉES DE PÈLERINAGE

notes by Jerome Lowenthal

Pilgrimage (*Middle English: pilgrimage*): *A journey to a sacred place or shrine.*

Années de pèlerinage (Years of Pilgrimage): Three volumes of piano music by Liszt. The composer uses a pilgrim's quest as a metaphor for his experiences during the ten years that followed his elopement with the Comtesse d'Agoult (volumes one and two) and their epilogue (volume three).

Liszt had met the countess in December, 1832, and he seems to have experienced a life-changing illumination in which his love of God, of music, of Marie and of literature fused into a single flame. His love letters, a few of which are excerpted below, tell the story (trans., J. Lowenthal):

September 2, 1833 (after a social matinee in which he accompanied her in some lieder)

You were sublime Saturday morning, quite simply sublime. Never have Goethe and Schubert been so understood, never had a vaster emotion taken over my inner being or scorched my forehead. Oh! Oh! Only death can follow such hours of rapture, of delirium. What song, what Poetry! Yes, at that moment I understood the universe as the raiment, the veil....while the soul is God.

July 25, 1834

Yesterday, I had no evening prayer to make. It seemed to me that we had not yet parted. Heaven shone magically with your radiance—your breath was still on my lips and my eyelids, your heartbeats joined mine and prolonged to infinity the double, immense life which you have revealed to me—which we have revealed to each other—all through the day I felt that I was in the midst of a chorus of angels and of heavenly spirits in whom there remained of the terrestrial an inexpressible imprint of suffering and compassion. I was part of some mysterious celebration, at once new and eternal. There, no longer was there space or time or words...but Infinity, Love, Oblivion, Pleasure and Charity!...in short, God, God as my soul seeks him, such as despair, and excess of sorrow sense Him sometimes, all-loving, all-powerful.

(The influence here is Balzac's Swedenborgian novel "Seraphita", which would have in the next century such an impact on Schönberg and Berg.)

And then, in the Spring of 1835, a new tone:

Oh let me be mad, insane! Reality, miserable, careful, narrow can no longer satisfy us....Now
(in English): THIS IS TO BE!!!

The situation had changed. Liszt had always dreamed of going away with Marie, but for her it was unthinkable to leave her husband and children for life as the déclassée mistress of a boy-genius. Then, in December 1834, Marie's older daughter died after a short illness. Marie, prostrate with grief, refused even to open Liszt's letters for months. Eventually, she agreed to see him and their reunion brought emotional release to them both. When she realized that she was pregnant with Liszt's child (the future Blandine), they decided to leave France. On May 28th, she arrived in Basel, Switzerland, with her mother, and Liszt joined her there on June 4th. The années de pèlerinage had begun.

Première année: Suisse (First Year: Switzerland)

(Preceded by "Les Cloches de G*****" from *Album d'un Voyageur*)

On Friday, December 18th, 1835, at 10:00 pm, Blandine Liszt was born. Her father, who had been composing a kind of musical travel diary, eventually published as *Album d'un Voyageur*, immediately composed a piece to celebrate the arrival of his first child and added it to the Traveler's Album. It is called "Les Cloches de G*****" (The Bells of G(eneva) and is dedicated to Blandine, with an epigraph from Liszt's beloved Byron. The bells of the title, as labeled in the score by the composer, are of two types. First there are church bells, forming delicate diatonic triads out of which emerges a haunting theme (which may have inspired the melody of Tchaikovsky's "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" (None but the Lonely Heart)). This is followed by four phrases of clock chimes, with an unvarying chime tone colored by shifting harmonies. In the first two phrases, the clock strikes nine, in the third, ten, and in the fourth, eight. As Blandine was born at ten o'clock, we may conjecture that it is her birth that is represented in this startling page of music. The chimes yield to a gently rocking barcarolle, marked *espressivo amorosamente*. The two principal thematic ideas are then led through

intertwining gardens of modulation, vaguely adhering to romantic sonata-form convention. Rhapsodic figuration dazzles and dies, the bells return in their original form and subside into silence.

When, later, Liszt revised the pieces of *Album d'un Voyageur* and published the revisions under the title *Années de pèlerinage, Suisse*, he placed the revised "Cloches de Genève" at the end of the volume, preceding it with eight pieces describing his travels through Switzerland with Marie d'Agoult. The first of these travel pieces is: "Chapelle de Guillaume Tell" (William Tell's Chapel). The actual chapel which Liszt visited was something of a tourist trap with no connection to the historic William Tell. But for Liszt (whose political sympathies at this time were nationalist, republican and leftist), Tell, who defied the Austrian tyrant, was a great hero, and Schiller's play, "Wilhelm Tell", was one of his favorite works of literature. Liszt's music is simple and grandly heroic, with echoing phrases to suggest the acoustics of the chapel.

From the chapel, we accompany the couple to "Au Lac de Wallenstadt" (At Lake Wallenstadt). In her memoirs, Mme. D'Agoult recalls fondly their visit: "We lingered long on the banks of the lake of Wallenstadt. There Franz composed for me a melancholy harmony imitative of the sigh of the waves and the dipping of the oars—never have I heard this piece without weeping." Mme. D'Agoult was a fine amateur musician and her words show insight into Liszt's musical language. As a compositional device, the use of accompaniment to imitate the sounds and rhythms of nature, while the melody suggests human emotions evoked by nature, may not have been invented by Liszt, but it became one of his most characteristic and ingeniously varied techniques.

"Pastorale"

The lovers continue their journey through the Swiss countryside. "Pastorale" shows Liszt's interest, perhaps suggested by Senancour's novel *Obermann*, in Alpine folk music. The piece is in simple bipartite form, with the "B" section, a musette.

From there, to more sophisticated pleasures. "Au Bord d'une Source" (Along a Flowing Spring) is another piece in which the accompaniment imitates the sound and rhythm of nature. Here the intermingling of the human song and the burbling, gurgling spring is accomplished with compositional ingenuity amounting to genius, in a work much admired by later composers. This is a piece which both describes pleasure and evokes it.

But now our couple is caught in a violent storm. "Orage" (Storm) is a written-down version of the improvisations with which the young Liszt had terrified and enchanted his Parisian salon hostesses. Cascading octaves and sweeping arpeggios suggest thunder and rain, while chromatic double-thirds imitate the sound of the wind. The piece is classically tripartite, with an optional cadenza. At this point, we may imagine that Marie, who is, after all, pregnant, has gone back to the hotel. But Franz emerges from the storm, shakes the rain out of his hair, and enters the musical, philosophical and aesthetic centerpiece of the volume.

"Vallée d'Obermann" (Obermann's Valley)

Obermann, the epistolary novel by Jean-Baptiste Pivert de Senancour (1770-1846), was first published in 1804, receiving no attention. However, when it was re-published in 1833, it soon found a host of enthralled readers, none of whom were more enthralled than Franz Liszt. The book, which in the next century was much admired by Marcel Proust and Vladimir Nabokov, seems to have spoken to Liszt in two important

ways. The young composer clearly identified with the protagonist, a superior man (Ober Mann or Übermensch or Superman) thrust into exile and loneliness by hostile destiny—a brother to Goethe's Werther, Chateaubriand's René and Byron's Childe Harold. The metaphysical questions that Liszt cites from *Obermann* are his own:

What do I want?

What am I?

What can I ask of Nature?

At the same time, Senancour's lyrical descriptions of nature, almost mystical in their intensity, speak to Liszt's pantheistic sense of nature as the object of a pilgrim's quest.

Inexpressible emotion...nature everywhere overwhelming, everywhere impenetrable, universal passion, advanced wisdom, voluptuous surrender...

The opening theme of the work, borrowed almost intact by Tchaikovsky in Eugene Onegin, hurls a series of desperately defiant questions, just as Obermann had done during his "memorable night under the moon"—a night in which he "devoured ten years of his life." In Liszt's music, the questions are answered by a slow-moving chorale of harsh dissonances, in which the question-motive (descending scale-tones) is used as an implacable bass-line. The dialogue progresses through sequential modulations that lead to a storm in which diminished seventh tremolos show nature as menacing and violent. But when the storm clears, the questions, now in major and in the piano's most grateful registers, unite with a caressingly quivering accompaniment that seems to represent nature at its most lovingly benign. Liszt, unlike Senancour, was a devout Christian, and "Vallée d'Obermann" ends characteristically with a musical statement of faith, slightly shadowed by harmonic ambiguity.

Now another pastorale, "Églogue" (Eclogue), but this piece is less naïve than the earlier "Pastorale". Although the lines of Byron which serve as an epigraph speak of the "dewy morn", the music has the resonance of church bells and moonlight. The music

is in sonatina form, with an exquisite coda.

“**Le mal du pays**” (Homesickness), the penultimate piece in the volume, is one of the most original. A series of panting phrases express with twisting harmonies the nuances of unhappiness. Sequential modulations lead back to a dark, despairing e minor.

And finally, back to “**Les cloches de Genève: Nocturne**” (The Bells of Geneva: Nocturne), this time without a dedication to Blandine and called Nocturne. Although the beginning and ending of this piece are quite similar to “Les cloches de G*****” from *Album d'un Voyageur*, most of it is an entirely different piece of music. The complex thematic and harmonic developments of “Les cloches de G*****” have disappeared and in its place is an elegiac nocturne which, augmented pianistically and enriched harmonically, leads back to the church bells and to the quiet of the Swiss night. This is Liszt’s musical farewell to Switzerland.

Deuxième année: Italie (Second Year: Italy)

Towards the end of July, 1837, Franz and Marie decided to move to Italy. Switzerland had long since lost its charm for them, and they had been staying as guests in Nohant, the country home of George Sand. However, multiple tensions among these volatile people, not to mention the fact that Marie was pregnant again, made a move seem desirable. On August 29th they arrived in Milan and immediately paid a visit to the Brera Gallery. Then as now, the most admired painting in the gallery was “**Sposalizio**”, the Marriage of the Virgin, the young Rafael’s masterpiece. Marie, however, was unimpressed and writes in her diary: “The composition is monotonous, the painting, dry, and the men’s faces much too feminine. Franz dislikes these stereotypical Italian Virgins—he finds their faces ordinary and entirely lacking in intelligence.” And yet,

whatever Franz had told Marie, he selected his musical rendering of Rafael’s painting, which itself is so rhythmical and harmonious as to seem painted in music, to open his *Deuxième année, Italie*. Liszt’s piece is a marvel in which monophony, modal harmonies and chorale textures translate the uncanny combination of humanity and spirituality in the painting. Liszt will continue to identify works of art as objects of pilgrimage, and Marie’s bad mood will not abate.

“Il Penseroso” (The Thinker)

At the beginning of 1839, the couple moved from Venice to Florence, where they were to remain for three months. The stay in Venice had been disastrous for their relationship and Marie, who was pregnant for the third time (Cosima had been born on December 24, 1837 and Daniel would be born in May, 1839) was in low spirits:

January 4—“I spend the day in bed with fits of suffocation.

January 5—I have already broken my promise. I have hurt him, I have wounded him. His travel plans and the arrangements he made for me here in Florence have greatly saddened me.”

Franz meanwhile was gazing in admiration at Michelangelo’s statue of Giuliano di Medici, known as “Il Penseroso”, in the Medici chapel of San Lorenzo. Michelangelo had always fascinated Liszt and the short piece inspired by the statue (Liszt requested that a reproduction of the statue as well as of Rafael’s “Sposalizio” be printed with the music) is a powerful minute of music, darker, perhaps, than the statue. Liszt’s technique here is the same as in the clock-chime section of “Les Cloches de G...”—an unchanging melody note (e-flat in both cases) over radically shifting harmonies.

"Canzonetta del Salvador Rosa"

The painter Rosa (1615-1673) was enormously admired—particularly in England—during the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. His paintings, like his life, were lively and imaginative, but this "Canzonetta" was in fact not by him but by the composer Bononcini. It is a simple and charming march in tripartite form, with words of energetic exhortation. Placed between the dark "Penseroso" and the passionate Petrarca sonnets, it serves as a palate-cleanser.

"Three Sonnets by Petrarca"

Liszt transcribed many of his own songs for piano solo, and some, like the "Liebestraume" and the "Petrarch Sonnets" are much better known as piano pieces. He composed the three Petrarch songs for high voice in 1838 and almost immediately transcribed them for piano. These transcriptions he then revised, and it is the revisions which we have in the *Années de pèlerinage*. Much later, he returned to this material and composed versions of the songs for low voice, simpler and darker than the earlier songs and inspired by a very different aesthetic.

"Sonetto 47 del Petrarca"

The key word in this poem is "benedetto,"—blessed. "Blessed," says the poet is everything connected in any way with his beloved. The music is tender and extremely warm without passion, except for the short middle section.

"Sonetto 104 del Petrarca"

This sonnet begins with a series of violent antitheses: "I can't find peace, I can't make war, I fear, I hope, I burn, I freeze", and later, "I feed on sorrow, weeping I laugh, death and life are equally indifferent to me. In this state, Lady, I am because of you." The ambiguity between adoration and hostility or, more simply, between love and hate, is

expressed in music of almost spasmodic intensity, extreme dynamic contrasts and lavish pianistic virtuosity. Understandably, this is the favorite of the set.

"Sonetto 123 del Petrarca"

Here, the beloved is described as all tints of the angelic. The melody reaches yearningly toward heaven, and the harmonies are even more paradisiac. Agitation in the middle section leads to a protracted series of exquisitely intimate cadences.

"Après une lecture de Dante: Fantasia Quasi Sonata"

(After Reading Dante: Fantasia Quasi Sonata)

The climax of the volume, this work is also the grandest and most ambitious work in all three volumes of the *Années de pèlerinage*. Begun probably in 1836, it did not reach its final form until 1849. The title, too, taken from a poem by Victor Hugo, was a late addition. Liszt had read Dante from early youth and did not need Hugo's poem to inspire him. However, it is worth noting that the theme of Hugo's poem set forth in the first verse: "Quand le poète peint l'enfer, il peint sa vie" (When the poet paints hell, he paints his life) corresponded directly to Liszt's aesthetic understanding.

The music begins with the proclamation of multiple tritones, the interval of the devil. These opening measures are a musical equivalent of the words written over the gate of hell: "Lasciate ogni speranza"—Abandon all hope. After this motto-introduction we hear in the first theme the moaning of myriad lost souls. The second theme, organically related to the first, is harmonized so as to express passion: cataclysmic, tender (was he thinking of Paolo and Francesca?) and, towards the end, celestial. These musical ideas, so different and yet genetically linked, are given a full epic treatment. Finally, the tritone becomes a perfect fifth and, at least within the limits of the piece, hell has been defeated.

"Venezia e Napoli" (Venice and Naples)

Marie's diary, March 28th, 1836: "Visit to the Ducal Palace... Venice is the modern Carthage, mercenary troops, ingratitude towards great men, a nation of merchants and swindlers." Marie loves the art but hates the city and feels that she is losing Franz. He, meanwhile, has fallen in love with the city. But it is only in 1840 that he writes a suite of pieces called *Venezia e Napoli*, and it is only nineteen years later that he revises them and joins the revised version as an appendix to *Années de pèlerinage: Italie*. The first piece, "Gondoliera", is a series of ever more lush variations on a gondolier's song over a barcarolle accompaniment. The second movement, "Canzone", is a setting with slight harmonic changes, of a Dantesque aria from Rossini's *Otello*: "Nessun Maggior Dolor" (No grief is as great as that of recalling past happiness). This movement is much shorter and more musically concentrated than the other two. The blackness of its expression melts into the bright-colored joy of the Neapolitan "Tarantella"—a tripartite composition in which the composer's pianistic ingenuity brings profundity out of banality. Thus the appendix brings brilliance and joy to conclude *Années de pèlerinage*, Volume 2.

Troisième année (Third Year)

Mountains and springs, love poems and Venetian canals, all seemed to the young Liszt to be fit objects of a pilgrim's veneration. By the time, however, that Liszt composed the Third Book of the *Années* (published in 1883 but composed mostly during the previous decade), his enthusiastic pantheism had been replaced by a theologically sophisticated orthodoxy, colored by general depression and an intense preoccupation with death. The ardent young disciple of Lammenais, whose books had been banned by the Vatican, had become the friend of the ultra-conservative pope Pio Nono and

the stout defender of the doctrine of papal infallibility.

And yet, the harmonic language of his late compositions does not seem to express unquestioning Christian faith. In particular, his death pieces are disconcerting in their ambiguity. The short piece called "Richard Wagner—Venezia" describes Wagner's death in Venice (did Thomas Mann know this piece?) as a descent from triumphant major triads into a trail of augmented nothingness. Perhaps the rigidity of Liszt's religious beliefs in these last years was a protection against doubt.

However this may be, the objects of pilgrimage evoked in this third book of the "Years of Pilgrimage" are centered on religious service and death rites. The seven pieces in the album are book-ended by positive expressions of faith, both in E major. The fourth of the set, "Jeux d'eau à la villa d'Este" is a poem of harmonic ecstasy in which the fountain waters become consubstantial with the baptismal font. All the other four pieces are threnodies—powerful expressions of despair.

"*Angélus! Prière aux anges gardiens*" (Angelus! Prayer to the Guardian angels) Written for his granddaughter Daniela (daughter of Cosima and Hans von Bulow) in October, 1877, "Angelus" is a rhythmically straightforward expression of piety. The harmonies are mostly those of diatonic church-music, and the piano-writing is devoid of ornament. A grand climax (with variant for harmonium) leads to an elegiac coda, and finally to a bare statement of thematic recollection.

"Aux cyprès de la Villa d'Este: Threnodie I & II" (To the Cypresses of the Villa d'Este: Threnody I and II)

The Villa d'Este, where Liszt lived for extended periods, was extremely beautiful, but

its cypress trees, traditionally symbolic of death, fed into Liszt's depression. These two works were composed a few months before the "Angelus" at a time when Liszt was particularly troubled, and the death symbolism can be felt throughout.

The first cypress threnody begins with a dark series of tolling low-register octaves which are followed by an equally dark and tonally ambiguous melody. Described by the composer as "almost loving," the melody rises through tortuous chromaticism and finally breaks free into full romantic flowering, only to sink back into darkness. The opening motive of the melody is then developed extensively until ominous chromatics bring a return, a semi-tone higher, of the "almost loving" romantic flowering. The piece ends with a long enigmatic, vaguely *religioso* coda, leading through minor coloration to a G major chord.

The remarkable second cypress threnody originally had the name of Michelangelo in its title, thereby linking it to "Il Penseroso" in Book Two, but when Liszt learned that his revered Michelangelo had no connection with the cypress trees, he renamed it "Threnody no. 2." The opening theme, strongly reminiscent of the opening of *Tristan and Isolde*, melts into a variety of other musical ideas, usually related by motivic transformation but widely divergent in expression: there is a fanfare theme, a *dolente* development, a melody of passionate lyricism, and floating harp-like chords. A *stretto* of the harp-like chords and the Tristan theme brings the piece to a mysterious close in which a bare E major "Tristan" statement recalls the end of "Angelus."

"Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este" (The Fountains of the Villa d'Este)

Generally regarded as the masterpiece of the album, this work shows that although Liszt may have lost interest in pianistic display, he still had a unique compositional command of piano virtuosity. However, the dazzling F sharp major fountains of sound, although similar to those that evoked Venetian waters in "Gondoliera" and

Lamartine's poetic ecstasy in "Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude" are here used as musical elaboration of the baptismal text of John 4:14, "But whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up the eternal life."

The musical waters are colored by harmonic rainbows which were to be recycled in Ravel's "Jeux d'eau" and Debussy's "Reflets dans l'eau." In this music, Liszt's famed virtuosity returns to life, refined and spiritualized.

"Sunt lacrymae rerum" (En mode hongrois)

("Here too are the tears of our misfortunes." (In the Hungarian Mode)) The Latin title, taken out of context, is often understood as meaning "They are the tears of existence," but in the context of Vergil's Aeneid means, "Here too are the tears of our misfortunes." Either interpretation would fit the music, but Liszt, who was a lover of Vergil, doubtless was thinking specifically of the misfortunes of his native Hungary—hence the second title, "in the Hungarian mode." By this time in his life, Liszt, as an admirer of the Hapsburg Empire, was opposed to Hungarian nationalism (as well as to Italian nationalism) but he still remained deeply aware of Hungary's tragic history. Musically, the Hungarian mode is most evident in the dithyrambic opening. The piece alternates between powerful expressions of pain and an *amoroso* theme which by contrast accentuates the tragic character of the other material. The concluding ambiguities are particularly startling. Liszt has found the way to make a major triad the supreme expression of mystery.

"Marche funèbre" (Funeral March)

Whatever political ambiguity may have motivated "Sunt Lacrymae Rerum", Liszt, by placing next to it this memorial to Maximilian and his short-lived Mexican em-

pire, made a statement of loyalty to the Austrian Emperor, who was Maximilian's brother, and even more to Napoleon III of France, Maximilian's sponsor and protector. Liszt himself had accepted from Maximilian, the year before the latter's execution, an appointment as Grand Officer of the order of Guadalupe, and Liszt's son-in-law, Emile Ollivier, was to become Napoleon's foreign minister. This music, as powerful in its way as Manet's pictorial representation of Maximilian's death, begins with a march of implacable ferocity, followed by a lonely melody leading through mysterious tremolos to a relentlessly triumphant F sharp major. From the Propertius epigram attached to the march, "In great things even to have wished is enough." we may infer Maximilian's spiritual triumph. For another view of the situation, see Bette Davis and Paul Muni in the 1938 film "Juarez."

"Sursum Corda" (Lift Up Your Hearts)

The final work of the *Années de pèlerinage*, "Sursum Corda", takes its title from the ordinary of the Catholic mass. Composed in a time of great depression, it is nevertheless an expression of faith and hope, even if we may infer from Liszt's correspondence that "Sursum Corda" referred to the deliverance of death rather than to happiness on earth. The entire piece is composed on an E pedal-point, with a melodic motive of ascension into what can only be described as harmonic turmoil. As the music (beloved of Béla Bartók) reaches up in ever more resounding phrases, there is a proliferation of dissonances hitherto unknown to the nineteenth century. Twelve triple forte measures pummel the piano with E major, making a harmonic link not only with the "Angelus" but also with the "Sposalizio" which opened book Two. Whatever Franz Liszt is giving assent to in this music, he makes that assent, coming as it does after a series of threnodies, the ultimate statement of the three volumes of *Années de pèlerinage*.

Weinachtsbaum, Heft II & III (Christmas Tree Suite, Book II & III)

On Christmas day, 1881, forty-fourth birthday of his daughter Cosima, Liszt surprised Cosima's daughter Daniela by going to her hotel-room in Rome and playing for her the *Christmas Tree Suite*, which he had just composed and dedicated to Daniela, herself. Liszt had been shaping these pieces for seven years, originally considering them as a pendant to his *Via Crucis*. As was often his custom, he arranged them both for piano solo and piano duet. The following year they were published but attracted little attention, and they have remained in something of a performance limbo. They are divided into three books, the first of which, containing simple transcriptions of Christmas carols, is of only moderate interest. Beginning with the second book, however, the music is entirely representative of late-Liszt's audacity. In eight remarkable minatures, he outlines the celebration of Christmas eve.

"Scherzoso: 'Man zündet die Kerzen des Baumes an'" (Merrymaking: 'The Lighting of the Candles on the Tree')

The candle-lighting is a very lively musical affair. The diatonic harmonies are subtly modal, suggesting church music, and the sonorities are brightly intricate. The end, as so often in late Liszt, is a disappearance.

"Carillon" (Chimes)

The chimes evoked here overlap in harmonies, rhythms, and sonorities. Gradually the sound builds up to a veritable pealing and then, as in the previous piece, gradually disappears. Although some of the music is solidly rooted in A major, the final chord is a dominant-flavored super-tonic.

"Schlummerlied" (Cradle-Song)

After singing carols, lighting candles, and listening to the church chimes, the children are put to sleep. When Daniela's aunt Blandine had been an infant, Liszt had played for her Schumann's newly-composed *Kinderszenen*. Perhaps he had in mind Schumann's "Child Falling Asleep", with its question-mark subdominant ending as he composed this exquisite page of music which ends with a musical hint that the child has fallen asleep. The rhythm, like that of Chopin's *Berceuse*, is in six eighths, but the accompaniment figure has more murmurs than Chopin's and less lift. Tenderness is in every note.

"Altes provenzalisches Weihnachtslied" (Old Provençal Christmas Song)

Another Christmas carol, but this one is imaginatively transcribed for piano.

"Abendglocken" (Evening Bells)

Another bell piece and one of the most quietly daring of the set. Unresolved seventh chords float through the atmosphere. A long pedal-point on A-flat does little to stabilize the tonality, and the final disappearing chord is an inverted F minor triad.

"Ehemals" (Old Times)

With the children asleep, the old people can reminisce. Who are the old people? From the two pieces which follow we may infer that they are Liszt and the Countess von Sayn Wittgenstein. What do they talk about? Of course we cannot say but their memories become passionate, then subside, come to life again and gradually are becalmed as they trail off in a final question.

"Ungarisch" (Hungarian)

This certainly is a self-portrait of the composer as warrior, marching towards victory

over his enemies. The ending is fortissimo but the harmony is uncertain and leads into "Polnisch" (Polish). This is the longest movement in the suite, again clearly intended as a portrait, this time of his Polish companion-in-life the Princess von Sayn Wittgenstein. We may, as we read Liszt's biographies and correspondence, think of the Princess as a malevolent bigot to whom the composer had inexplicably bound himself, but the musical portrait, in the form of a beautiful Mazurka, is full of love and admiration. Although the somewhat bombastic ending may suggest the lady's unwearied stubbornness, it may also tell us that Liszt's Christmas eve, with his granddaughter and his lady-love, brought him sweetness and contentment.



JEROME LOWENTHAL, born in 1932, continues to fascinate audiences, who find in his playing a youthful intensity and an eloquence born of life-experience. He is

a virtuoso of the fingers and the emotions. Mr. Lowenthal studied in his native Philadelphia with Olga Samaroff-Stokowski, in New York with William Kapell and Edward Steuermann, and in Paris with Alfred Cortot, meanwhile traveling annually to Los Angeles for coachings with Artur Schnabel. After winning prizes in three international competitions (Bolzano, Darmstadt, and Brussels), he moved to Jerusalem where, for three years, he played, taught and lectured.

Returning to America, he made his debut with the New York Philharmonic playing Bartok's Concerto No. 2 in 1963. Since then, he has performed more-or-less everywhere, from the Aleutians to Zagreb. Conductors with whom he has appeared as soloist include Barenboim, Ozawa, Tilson Thomas, Temirkanov, and Slatkin, as well

as such giants of the past as Leonard Bernstein, Eugene Ormandy, Pierre Monteux and Leopold Stokowski. He has played sonatas with Itzhak Perlman, piano duos with Ronit Amir (his late wife), Carmel Lowenthal (his daughter), and Ursula Oppens, as well as quintets with the Lark, Avalon and Shanghai Quartets. He has recently recorded the Beethoven Fourth Concerto with cadenzas by eleven different composers. His other recordings include concerti by Tchaikovsky and Liszt, solo works by Sinding and Bartok, and chamber-music by Messiaen, Arensky and Taneyev.

Teaching, too, is an important part of Mr. Lowenthal's musical life. For nineteen years at the Juilliard School and for forty summers at the Music Academy of the West, he has worked with an extraordinary number of gifted pianists, whom he encourages to understand the music they play in a wide aesthetic and cultural perspective and to project it with the freedom which that perspective allows.



Pianist Carmel Lowenthal began her studies at age four with her father, Jerome Lowenthal and her mother, Ronit Amir. Ms. Lowenthal is active as both a performer—giving concerts in recent years at venues including Avery Fisher Hall, the Skaneateles Festival, Bargemusic Festival, Bard and at the SUNY Performing Arts Center—and a dedicated teacher on the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music Precollege. She lives in New York with her husband and their three young children.

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