

# Virtuosity: Clara Wieck and Franz Liszt

April 12, 2018

# Revolution

- ▶ Louis XVI presides over a state perennially at war and in debt
- ▶ French Revolutionary War(s) – 1792 – 1802
  - ▶ Subordination of Church to State, deposition of royal family. “cult of reason”; new calendar, secularization of Notre Dame
  - ▶ First coalition (1792 – 1797), second coalition (1797- 1802)
  - ▶ 1791 Haitian Uprising
  - ▶ 1791 Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen, Olympe de Gouges
  - ▶ 1789 Womens' March on Versailles
  - ▶ 1799 Napoleon's coup d'etat; in 1804, declares himself Emperor. Power of the Individual. “je suis la revolution.”
  - ▶ 1805 Eroica symphony
  - ▶ 1816 Argentine Independence
- ▶ 10 months peace (Amiens Truce), but Napoleon harbors imperial ambitions. Napoleonic Wars.
- ▶ 1812 battle of Borodino (War and Peace)
- ▶ 1815 Congress of Vienna; Bourbon Restoration in France
- ▶ 1830 July Revolution (“2 nd French revolution”) – another constitutional monarchy

# Revolution

- ▶ 1848 “France sneezed again, and most of continental Europe caught the cold” (Roberts)
- ▶ 1848 Communist Manifesto
- ▶ 1871 Brutal suppression of Paris Commune

# “Revolution”

- ▶ “That century was haunted by the idea of revolution. Ambiguity explains much of its power over men’s minds.” (John Roberts, “Revolutions from Above and Below,” in The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern Europe)
- ▶ “The idea that the central issue of politics was to be for or against the revolution was a great simplifier; it provided a way of seeing, understanding, explaining things otherwise difficult or unintelligible.”
- ▶ “European political life since 1789 was influenced by innovation in science, philosophical ideas, social assumptions, and much else which redefined the role of religion. Elites which had once rested on unquestioned foundations dissolved, or abandoned themselves to the opportunities of industrial and commercial society.”

# Democratization of Taste

- ▶ Aristocracy: debasement of art
- ▶ Bourgeoisie: enlivening, enrichment
- ▶ Artists: sell tickets! The rise of the itinerant virtuoso.
- ▶ “Aristocracy of merit.”
- ▶ Realism (cf. With respect to Donizetti)
  - ▶ “The young composer-improviser Liszt adapted the authorial voice of the 19 th century novel in which the awareness of form and artificiality, even the voice of the author, became muted.” (Botstein, p. 524)
  - ▶ “The demonstration of taste and sentimental response to music were antidotes to the social insecurity that that wealth alone could not mitigate.” (Botstein, 526)
  - ▶ “Liszt shaped virtuosity into persuasive surrogate for the sense of astonishment once derived from the vast expanse of revolutionary political action and conquest. To gain notice, even in the hands of a child, virtuosity needed to approximate the Napoleonic, to startle with the sublime.” (Botstein, 534)

# What did it look like?

Mary Ann Evans: “There was nothing strange or excessive about his manner. His manipulation of the instrument was quiet and easy and his face was simply grand. The lips compressed and the head thrown a little backward...a sweet smile flitted over his features...the nostrils dilated. There was nothing petty or egoistic to mar the picture.”

Hanslick: “Sometimes the eyes flash beneath prominent brows; sometimes the characteristically upturned corners of the mouth are raised even high in a gentle smile.”

Moscheles: “**The tossing about of his hands**, which he seems to think a mark of inspiration, I still regard as an eccentricity, although it is no doubt remarkable that he accomplishes the most perilous leaps with scarcely a single mishap.”

# What did it mean?

Gustav Schilling (19th c. musicologist): “The virtuosi in our concert halls are not only the thermometers of artistic and taste culture ... but also phenomena that have a political significance, in so far as, through the supreme power of their activity, they are able to set significant levers to this culture.” (quoted in “The Politics of Liszt’s Virtuosity,” *Liszt and the Birth of Modern Europe*)

# Niccolo Paganini

“Paganini almost single handedly forged the Romantic mystique of virtuosity as a superhuman endowment.”

- ▶ Caprice, op. 1, no. 13
- ▶ no. 24



# Franz Liszt, 1811 – 1886

- ▶ “Liszt and the piano came of age at the same time.”
- ▶ Metal in frame, double escapement
- ▶ Born to a steward on the Esterhazy estate in Raiding, Hungary.
- ▶ Sent to Vienna to study with Salieri and Czerny.
- ▶ Leaves Czerny for the Paris Conservatoire, where he is refused as a foreigner.
- ▶ Saw Paganini in Vienna 1831
- ▶ 1832 Extreme affair with Countess Marie d'Agoult (Daniel Stern), they elope, and have three children in Switzerland – including Cosima (later to marry Wagner).

## Marie D'Agoult, aka Daniel Stern, *Nelida* I

Begins with a monograph from Hegel: “All the phenomena of the present age reveal that satisfaction with the old life is not to be found.”

“This society affirms itself to be Christian; it assures us that the education it gives the young...agrees with in all respects with the teachings of the Gospel. It exults in that presumed agreement, pretending not to notice that Christ’s word **is the strong condemnation of its own animating spirit.**” (p. 27)

## Marie D'Agoult, aka Daniel Stern, *Nelida* II

- ▶ Arranged marriage to mssr de Valmer. Affair with Guermann the painter.
- ▶ “Guerman spoke, applying to his art the mystical language of believers. Beauty, according to him, was God; art was its religion; the artist, its preist; the beloved was the radiant Beatrice, pure and unblemished, who guides the poet through celestial spheres.” (p 63)
- ▶ “Guermann loved Nelida passionately. He loved her with his whole imagination and all of his pride – the two reigning forces in his life.”

# Marie D'Agoult, aka Daniel Stern, *Nelida* III

- ▶ “you’re a painter,” interrupted the vicomtesse. “Ah, I congratulate you! That’s wonderful. Do you paint watercolors or miniatures?”
- ▶ “I hope to do historical tableaux,” answered the young man with calm assurance. (p. 46)

# Selected Works

- ▶ Grande fantaisie de bravoure sur La Clochette de Paganini
- ▶ Études d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini
- ▶ No. 6, variation 10 quotes
- ▶ Beethoven Op. 111
- ▶ *Erlkonig*
- ▶ Lucia di Lammermoor

# Clara Josephine Wieck, 1819 – 1896

- ▶ Father Friedrich Wieck, famous piano teacher and salseman. Lower middle class, not a great virtuoso himself.
- ▶ Mother Marianne Tromlitz, musical family, a good marriage for Friedrich Wieck.
- ▶ “Clara”, born to be a virtuosa, more talented than her brothers.
- ▶ Personality of Friedrich...difficult.

# Clara's *Tagebuch*

- ▶ “Father arrived by express coach at seven in the evening. I flew into his arms and took him right to the Hotel Stadt Frnakfurt.”
- ▶ “He seemed to be taking over her personality” (Nancy Reich)

# Clara's career

- ▶ At age 7, three hours per day; one for lesson, two for practice.
- ▶ Education planned for concert virtuosa career, by a career educator.
- ▶ 1830 – Robert Schumann abandons a career in law to study with the renowned Wieck.
- ▶ 1831, first international tour – perform for Goethe



# Industrious Friedrich

*In each situation...Wieck had to perform the same chores – find lodging, provide himself and his child with food, cajole prospective patrons, make the proper contacts, rent the halls, try out the pianos, calculate which piece would have the best effect, publicize the event, and collect the money. And in each town Clara dutifully copied into her diary Wieck's letters to friends and foes, excoriating the provincial audiences and unresponsive patrons, commenting on fees, complimentary tickets...she was learning how to manage a concert tour.*

(Reich, p. 49)

# Sadness in Clara

Duke of Weimmar:

*We heard the little Wieck of Leipzig—she's a veritable marvel...perfect execution, irreproachable measure, force, clarity...one takes an interest in her without wanting to...poor child! she has a look of unhappiness and of suffering, which distresses me but she owes perhaps a part of her fine talent to this inclination to melancholy.*

(Quoted in Reich, p. 50)

## F. Wieck the capitalist

- ▶ “Clara can never compensate me for what I am doing for her.”
- ▶ Reich: “As her father, teacher, and concert manager, Weick believed he was entitled to the money she earned, and told her so in later years when Clara requested the return of money for which she had worked.”
- ▶ “When she persisted in plans to marry Robert Schumann, she was informed that she owed Wieck money for the lessons she had given her. He also demanded that she share her earnings with her brothers and other family members. During the battle she told Robert that she had never received so much as a pin from her stepmother; she was always told to use her own money.” (55)

## Abuse: Clara's diary

*My father, who long had hoped for a change of disposition on my part, observed again today that I am just as lazy, careless, disorderly, stubborn, disobedient, etc. as ever, and that I am the same in my piano playing and my studies. And because I played...so badly, and didn't repeat the first part of the first variation, not even once, he tore up the copy before my eyes, and from today on he will not give me any more lessons and I may not play anything but scales...*

(55)

## Abuse: Robert's Diary

*Yesterday I saw a scene whose impression will be indelible. (Wieck) is surely a wicked man. Alwin had not played well: "You wretch, you wretch – is this the pleasure you give your father" – how he threw him on the floor, pulled him by the hair, trembled and staggered, sat still to rest and gain strength for new feats, could barely stand on his legs anymore and had to throw his prey down, how the boy begged and implored him to give him the violin – he wanted to play, he wanted to play – I can barely describe it – and to all this– Zilia (Clara) smiled and calmly sat herself down at the piano with Weber sonata...Am I among humans?*

(56)

# Clara the composer

- ▶ Four polonaises, Op. 1 – published at age 10
- ▶ Er est gekommen in Sturm und Regen
- ▶ Romance Variee pour le piano, Op. 3
- ▶ Theme recurs in Clara's Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 20
- ▶ And in Brahms, Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 9
- ▶ And in Robert's Impromptus sur une Romance de Clara Wieck, op. 5
- ▶ Op. 11, Trois Romances pour le piano