

## Mehmet Erman Mete

### FRANZ LISZT IN ISTANBUL

Franz Liszt arrived in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1847 right after accepting a written invitation from Sultan Abdulmejid. During the trip Liszt gave several piano recitals. These recitals had a broad repercussion in Europe's music press: media was writing about him and his performances numerous articles and news.

Before Liszt's date of arrival to Istanbul, a grand piano by *Érard* brand was prepared for him in Paris and shipped to Istanbul. On 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1847 he wrote a thank-you note to Pierre *Érard* from Odessa as the following:

I owe you the most sincere thanks, my dear *Érard*, for the kind attention which you showed towards me in sending one of your magnificent instruments to me in Constantinople. Even before I embarked at Galatz, the Journal of Constantinople had advised me of this kind gesture which so reflects your thoughtfulness; but I was no less pleasantly surprised when running my fingers over the keys at the Tcheragan Palace at an instrument "of such power and such perfection," as you happily put it in your letter to M. Donizetti, which the Journal de Constantinople published in full.<sup>1</sup>

More precisely, Franz Liszt arrived in Istanbul on 15<sup>th</sup> of June 1847 by ship from Galatz. Immediately after landing in Istanbul he was brought in the *Çırağan* Palace by Sultan Abdulmejid's order. That is to say the first person to welcome Liszt was Sultan's interpreter in the Palace, where Liszt was later welcomed with enormous honour and a music symphony.

After the welcome ceremony Sultan Abdulmejid asked Liszt to play some of his pieces to show his ability and demonstrate his famous finger power. Liszt did not hesitate and played e.g. *Lucia di Lammermoor – Andante*, *William Tell* and *Norma*.

After Liszt's performance, Sultan invited him to visit him again in the Palace. During this visit Sultan gave him as a gift an exceptionally beautiful snuffbox decorated with diamonds. It has been said that this gesture was a big compliment from Sultan to Liszt. Liszt gave a concert in the *Çırağan*

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Short: *Liszt Letters in the Library of Congress*. (New York: Pendragon Press, 1994), Letter No. 49, p 47.

Palace at the same. He chose the repertoire from his most famous operatic works.

Afterwards Liszt wrote about the concert and about the Sultan to Marie d'Agoult, on 17<sup>th</sup> of July in 1847 from Galatz, the following:

His Majesty the Sultan was extremely gracious to me, and that after having compensated me both in money... and with a gift (a charming enamel box with brilliants), he conferred on me the Order of Nişan-İftihar in diamonds. I admit that I was greatly surprised to find His Highness so well informed about my bit of celebrity that long before my arrival he had told both the Austrian Ambassador and Donizetti, that as soon as I had disembarked they were to take me to his Palace of Tcheragan.<sup>2</sup>

While staying in Istanbul Liszt gave some other concerts additionally. One of them was held at Franchini Mansion on 18<sup>th</sup> of June. The concert programme was French and the concert received a lot of attention from Turkish reporters. The program itself included six pieces which were the virtuosity of Liszt's transcription. While performing, he modified and added some notes to the pieces: 1) *Andante de Lucia de Lammermoor*, 2) *Fantaisie sur des motifs de la Norma*, 3) *Mazurka de Chopin*, 4) *Le roi des Aulnes, melodie de Shubert*, 5) *Hexameron, variations sur un theema the Puritains*, 6) *Melodies Hongroises*.

Liszt gave some other private and public concerts in Istanbul. To mention a few, concerts such as the one held at Fethi Pasha Mansion and in the Russian Embassy at Pera are worth mentioning. On 28<sup>th</sup> of June the Russian Embassy organized the concert for the benefit of Association Commerciale- Artisane de Piere.

During his visit in Istanbul Liszt stayed in the famous piano fabricator M. Alexander Kommendinger's house. Liszt was considered as a guest of Kommendinger family. After five weeks stay in Istanbul, Franz Liszt left on 13<sup>rd</sup> July 1847.

## References

- Short, Michael: *Liszt Letters in the Library of Congress*. New York: Pendragon Press, 1994
- Williams, Adrian: *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters*. Gloucestershire: Clarendon Press, 1998

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<sup>2</sup> Adrian Williams: *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters*. (Gloucestershire: Clarendon Press, 1998), p 255.