

Austerity, Resignation, and Hope in Liszt's Experimental Late Music

Traveling as a world-famous traveling virtuoso in 1845, Franz Liszt set Georg Herwegh's *Ich möchte Hingehn* to music and later referred to the song as "my testament of youth." The song closes with the text: "The poor human heart must break piece by piece!" Even at the height of his fame as a touring virtuoso, Liszt's unhappiness was genuine and profound. His despair greatly intensified after the deaths of his son Daniel and daughter Blandine in 1859 and 1862, respectively. In 1883, Liszt wrote, "I carry a deep sadness of the heart which must now and then break out in sound."

Liszt often represents this despondency in music by radically exploring tonality, including intense chromaticism, whole-tone scales, tritones, augmented sonorities, unresolved dissonances, and fully diminished seventh chords. At times, he employs his autobiographical FAC# triad, or (FrAnCIScus), during these years. Nevertheless, Liszt nearly always turns his darkest thoughts into transformations that transcend his desolation. No matter how dark and overwhelmingly dissonant his works can appear, seen most definitely in his *Unstern: sinistre, disastro*, Liszt's transcendent side appears to include major sonorities and to move away from the previous dissonant cries. These late works illustrate Liszt's attempt to ascend over life's despair and to transcend his grief.

Franz Liszt lived until age 75 and actively composed music to his dying days. Over his last seventeen years, his music approached atonality. The depths he explored in his late years are a testament to him as a creative artist who forever refused to be silent, no matter how broken his heart or full of transcendent joy. Liszt's music was undoubtedly ahead of his time, but he chose to compose what was within him. He said, 'I calmly persist in staying stubbornly in my corner, and just work at becoming more and more misunderstood'."