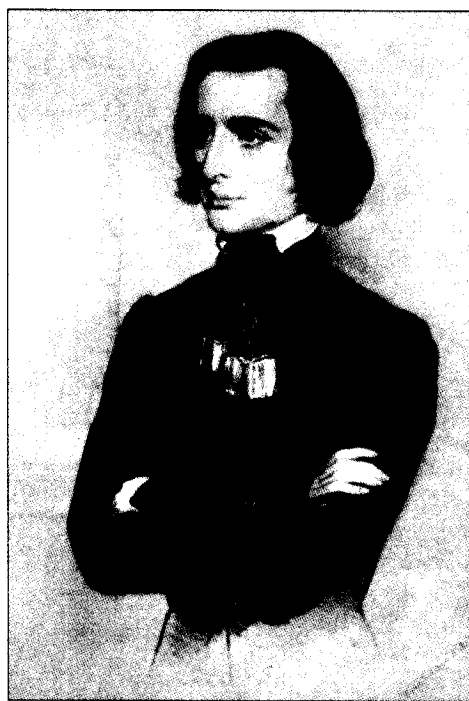


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# *Liszt 2000*

THE GREAT HUNGARIAN AND  
EUROPEAN MASTER AT THE THRESHOLD  
OF THE 21ST CENTURY



A NAGY MAGYAR ÉS EURÓPAI MESTER  
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LISZT FERENC TÁRSASÁG  
BUDAPEST

# Liszt 2000

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*Selected Lectures given  
at the International Liszt Conference  
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of the Hungarian Liszt Society

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PAUL MERRICK

## G flat or F sharp? The Cycle of Keys in Liszt's Music

*(This paper is dedicated to the memory of the Hungarian  
choral conductor Miklós Forrai [1913–1998],  
whose pioneer recording of the oratorio Christus in 1973  
inspired my researches into Liszt.)*

Let me begin by quoting two entries from the catalogue of Liszt's works given by Humphrey Searle at the end of his book *The Music of Liszt*<sup>1</sup>. The first entry is:

136. *Étude en 48 exercices dans tous les tons majeurs et mineurs*. 1826; only 12 were written.

The second entry is:

137. *24 Grandes Études*. C.1838; from 136. Only 12 were written.

In the main text of the book<sup>2</sup> Searle says:

"The earliest version of the *Transcendental Studies* dates back to Liszt's sixteenth year; it was called...*Étude en 48 Exercices* – though in fact only twelve were ever written. Liszt, presumably following the example of Bach, intended to write two studies in each major and minor key, and the twelve completed studies are arranged in a definite key sequence – C major, A minor; F major, D minor; B flat major, G minor, etc."

It is clearly the number 48 that suggests the example of Bach, but to compose studies "dans tous les tons majeurs et mineurs" it is only necessary to compose 24 pieces, as there are 12 major keys and 12 minor keys. Bach composed two books of 24 each, hence the number 48. The title of S137 contains the number 24, and seems to reflect this musical logic, while continuing to express the same intention on Liszt's part of exploring the cycle of keys. The final version of the *Transcendental Studies*, published in 1852, preserves the key format of the 1826 set unchanged, though the music itself has travelled a long way, 10 of the 12 pieces having also acquired titles en route. Thus over a period of nearly thirty years Liszt did not complete the scheme he started out with, which was to write 24 studies. His chosen key sequence moves in an increasing number of flats, starting from C major and A minor with none, and stopping at 5 flats, D flat major and B flat minor. Thus these studies have no key signatures with sharps. To continue the sequence Liszt would have had to choose between G flat major with 6 flats, or F sharp major with 6 sharps. A similar choice between sharps and flats could be made for the succeeding key: either C flat major with 7 flats, or B major with 5 sharps.

But beyond these, there was no choice, only sharps. The sequence would continue through E, A, D and G back to C.

Liszt seems to have had a predilection for this key pattern, as it appears in the lesson diary kept by Mme Auguste Boissier under the entry for Sunday January 15th 1832<sup>3</sup>:

He told Valérie to practice every day for two hours a series of vigorously played scales in octaves [...]; then to study arpeggiated octaves in scales, starting from C major to the relative key of A minor, then F major to its relative minor, and so forth.

This pattern places each key in a dominant-tonic relationship with the one that follows. Hence if we hear F with 1 flat after C with none, or B $\flat$  with 2 flats after F with 1, the first becomes in our mind a dominant preparation to the new one. This scheme of rising 4ths can also be viewed as moving in 5ths downwards, and as such is the inversion of the common view of the cycle of 5ths given in musical textbooks, where the ascending sequence of sharps appears first. If we begin on C, and move up the piano keyboard a 5th at a time until C is reached again, we play all the black notes, regardless of whether they are called sharp or flat. Yet if a child sits at the piano and looks for the exact mid-point between C and the C an octave higher, which is also the furthest point tonally, then he finds the black note where sharps and flats meet in terms of their number being 6, and must therefore decide whether to call it F# or G $\flat$ . That Liszt left unresolved the question of how to continue the key sequence in 1826 seems to have been related to this dilemma.

Any key scheme presenting the major and minor tonalities must use each key signature twice. For example 3 flats will be both E $\flat$  major or C minor. Thus to cover 24 keys one requires only 12 key signatures. But as the maximum number of sharps or flats used in practice is 7, then there are seven flat key signatures and seven sharp key signatures, plus a signature without either sharps or flats. This means that a composer has a choice of 15 key signatures to notate a group of 12 tonalities (any single key signature indicating either one of the 12 major or one of the 12 minor keys). The question is which of the enharmonic "double" alternatives will he choose (5 flats or 7 sharps, 6 flats or 6 sharps, 7 flats or 5 sharps), and where will these occur in the cycle of 5ths, which is a scheme where flats must at some point give way to sharps, or vice versa.

A collection of studies by Liszt which includes examples which cover the complete range of tonalities is the 12 books of *Technical Studies* (S146) published between 1868 and c.1880. The same sequence of keys is used as in the *Transcendental Studies*; after the 5 flats (D $\flat$  major and B $\flat$  minor) the sequence continues with 6 flats (G $\flat$  major and E $\flat$  minor), followed by 5 sharps (B major and G# minor). (See *mus. ex. 1.*)

Vorstudien zu den Dur- und Mollskalen

Preliminary Studies to the Major and Minor Scales

Előtanulmányok a dur és moll skálákhoz

①

5

2

②

4

③

6

This block contains the first six measures of a musical exercise. It is written for a single melodic line on a five-line staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. Measure 1 is marked with a circled '1'. Measure 5 is marked with a '5'. Measure 2 is marked with a '2'. Measure 4 is marked with a circled '2'. Measure 6 is marked with a circled '3'. The exercise consists of eighth-note patterns, some ascending and some descending, with rests. The notation includes various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and slurs.

④

5

10

⑥

12

This block contains the next six measures of the musical exercise, continuing from measure 6. Measure 7 is marked with a circled '4'. Measure 9 is marked with a circled '5'. Measure 10 is marked with a '10'. Measure 11 is marked with a circled '6'. Measure 12 is marked with a '12'. The notation continues with eighth-note patterns and rests, maintaining the same key signature and time signature.

Example 1 (top half) shows measures 10 and 11 of a musical piece. The notation is in G-flat major (three flats). Measure 10 is a whole note chord, and measure 11 is a whole note chord. The key signature is G-flat major.

Example 1 (bottom half) shows measures 12 and 13 of the same musical piece. Measure 12 is a whole note chord, and measure 13 is a whole note chord. The key signature is G-flat major.

Example 1 (cont.)

In accordance with this principle, Liszt would have had to compose a 13th and 14th study in the set of *Transcendental Studies* using a key signature of 6 flats. As we know, he did not. The question is why not.

I decided to look for the key of G flat major in Liszt's music. I examined about 300 works. The numbers in Searle's catalogue which I consulted were as follows:

- S1
- Don Sanche* (opera)
- S2-66
- Sacred choral works
- S95-126 and S691
- Orchestral works, including those with piano
- S136-254
- Original works for piano 2 hands
- S259-268
- Organ works (supplemented by those not in Searle's catalogue which figure in the Universal Edition edited by Martin Haselböck)
- S269-350
- Songs and recitations

I divided my key cataloguing into main key and sectional key, the latter referring to any part of a work or movement where the key signature under consideration appears. In the whole of this output, I found no works where the main key is G $\flat$  major, and only 4 instances of sectional use of 6 flats as G $\flat$  major, namely in the two songs *Le vieux vagabond* S304 and *J'ai perdu ma force et ma vie* S327, in the Credo of the *Missa pro organo* S264, and in the piano piece *Sarabande* and *Chaconne from Handel's "Almira"* S181. My conclusion, therefore, is that outside the *Technical Studies* Liszt chose not to write any pieces whose main tonality is G $\flat$  major.

There are, however, as we all know, a number of pieces by Liszt in F# major. The following, for example, figure among the piano works:

1834	S155.1	<i>Senza lentezza (Apparitions)</i>
1840	S159.3	<i>Gondoliera (Venezia e Napoli)</i>
1845-52	S173.3	<i>Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude</i> (from <i>Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses</i> )
after 1860	S193	<i>Klavierstück, F#</i>
1865-79	S192.3.4.	(from <i>Fünf kleine Klavierstücke</i> )
1866-7	S163.4	<i>Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este</i> (from <i>Années de Pèlerinage, troisième année</i> )
1872	S191	<i>Impromptu ('Nocturne')</i>
1874-6	S186.7	<i>Schlummerlied</i> (from <i>Weihnachtsbaum</i> )
1881-?1885	S215.1	<i>first Valse oublié</i>
1883	S216	<i>Third Mephisto Waltz</i>

If he wished to follow, therefore, the overall key scheme displayed in the works I examined, Liszt would have had to continue the *Transcendental Studies* by com-

posing a 13th and 14th study in 6 sharps F# major and D# minor respectively, at the same time crossing over from the flat side to the sharp side of the cycle of fifths. The completed set of key signatures in the key cycle would then have been as follows:

1.	0 sharps, 0 flats,	C major/A minor
2.	1 flat,	F major/D minor
3.	2 flats,	B $\flat$ major/G minor
4.	3 flats,	E $\flat$ major/C minor
5.	4 flats,	A $\flat$ major/F minor
6.	5 flats,	D $\flat$ major/B $\flat$ minor
7.	6 sharps,	F# major/D# minor
8.	5 sharps,	B major/G# minor
9.	4 sharps,	E major/C# minor
10.	3 sharps,	A major/F# minor
11.	2 sharps,	D major/B minor
12.	1 sharp,	G major/E minor
(13.= 1.)		

In this scheme the change from flats to sharps at D $\flat$  major and F# major, though not matching what we find in the *Technical Studies* (where the change is at G $\flat$  major and B major), does nevertheless correspond to Liszt's practice as it is found in his major output.

The picture, however, is not complete, in that Liszt composed some music, though very little, in C# major. The only example I have found of its use as the main key is the late piano piece *Recueillement* S204, composed for a collection in memory of Bellini. In my sectional key group there are 5 examples of sections with a key signature of 7 sharps:

1. S3 *Christus*. No.9. The Miracle. Postlude.
2. S107 *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe*, symphonic poem No.13, the closing section.
3. S184 *Urbi et orbi* for piano, the final section.
4. S244 *Hungarian Rhapsody* No.6, which has both D $\flat$  and C#.
5. S345 *Wartburglieder* III. Walther von der Vogelweide. Ending and piano postlude.

Liszt appears to have had associations with this key which might account for his sparing use of it. Let us take the examples with text or programme, beginning with the piano music.

*Urbi et orbi* is the papal blessing for Rome and the world. It has a key signature of 4 sharps C# minor for the opening section based on the chant melody, at the end of which the signature changes to 7 sharps C# major. Before the final cadence Liszt returns to the 4 sharps, giving the words of the blessing and its chant minus harmony. He then reinstates the C# major key signature for the wordless grand "Amen" cadence of the closing bars.



The final section of the 13th *symphonic poem* bears the inscription "the cradle of the afterlife", which is Liszt's interpretation of the [*Von der Wiege bis zum*] *Grabe* [grave] of the work's title. The music is a repeat in C# major of the opening *Wiege* [cradle] material, which is in C major.

The main tonality of the song from the *Wartburglieder* is 4# E major, changing to 7# at the end. The text is a dialogue in which a monk and nun who are turned to stone converse with a bridal couple.

*Beim Scheiden der Sonne erschimmert  
der Metilstein freundlich und klar,  
dort ragen der Mönch und die Nonne  
versteinert als Felsenpaar.  
Heil den Neuvermählten,  
sprach Mönch und Nonne zu mir,  
Wir hoffen, die Beiden besuchen  
recht bald unser tannig Revier.  
Da breitet sich ihnen zu Füßen  
ihr Erbland in wonnigem Schein,  
und wenn sie auch wakker sich küssen,  
sie werden drum nicht gleich zu Stein!*

[As the sun sets the Metilstein is bathed in a friendly clear light, towering there in stone are a monk and a nun like two rocks. Hail, newlyweds, said the monk and the nun to me, we hope you will both soon visit our place with its fir trees. There at your feet extends your blissfully radiant hereditary domain, and should you also boldly kiss, you'll not straight turn to stone!]

The C# major ending, including the page-long solo postlude for the piano, describes the bridal couple's "Erbland in wonnigem Schein" [blissfully radiant hereditary domain] and the "kiss". Unlike the monk and nun, the couple will not turn to stone; Liszt's music evokes rather a transfigured awakening.

In these instances of Liszt's use of the key of C# major we can detect the presence of an idea, to which I would give the Latin title *aeternitas*. (This association itself serves as a comment from Liszt to the memory of the composer Bellini.)

Into this context the Miracle music of *Christus* fits naturally. In the oratorio the music in 7 sharps C# major occurs where Christ calms the storm on Lake Galilee. The storm has a signature of no sharps or flats, but when the choir sing "et fecit tranquillitas magna", the orchestra play a beautiful postlude with the signature of 7 sharps. (See *mus. ex. 2*.)

Within the broader tonal context of the oratorio, however, Liszt's use of C# major at this point contravenes the practice that might normally be expected, namely that it would function as the tonic major of C# minor. The 11th movement

The musical score is for 'Christus, No. 9' by Franz Liszt. It is a vocal and piano work. The score is divided into five systems, each with a vocal choir part and a piano accompaniment part. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The time signature is 4/4. The score begins at measure 221. The vocal parts are labeled 'CORO' and the piano part is labeled 'P'. The lyrics are in Latin: 'Et fa - - cta', 'est tran - - quil - li - tas ma - - gna.', and 'K'. The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *espr.*, *cresc. molto*, and *mf*. The score ends at measure 250.

221  
CORO  
Et fa - - cta  
Et fa - - cta  
Et fa - - cta  
Et fa - - cta  
P  
espr. cresc. molto  
228  
CORO  
est tran - - quil - li - tas ma - - gna.  
est tran - - quil - li - tas ma - - gna.  
est tran - - quil - li - tas ma - - gna.  
est tran - - quil - li - tas ma - - gna.  
P  
235  
K  
243  
mf espr. sostenuto assai  
250

Example 2. Christus. No. 9

of the oratorio, *Tristis est anima mea*, which is in C# minor with a signature of 4 sharps, has its final section notated in D $\flat$  major with a signature of 5 flats, which is obviously intended to be heard as the tonic major. (See *mus. ex. 3.*)

127 Bar. solo Tris- tis, tristis est

133 Bar. solo a - ni - ma - mea - usque ad mor - tem,

139

146 H

153 Bar. solo Pa- ter, Pa- ter,

161 Bar. solo si pos - si - bi - le est, trans - e - at a

Example 3. Christus. No. 11

It should be said right away that examples of this practice abound. Two well-known instances in the piano literature are the second movement of Beethoven's *Sonata Op. 27 No. 2* in C# minor (*Moonlight*) and the finale of Tchaikovsky's early *C# minor sonata*, both of which are notated in D $\flat$ , in a context where the composer's intention is clearly to express the tonic major. Economy would dictate this procedure, to avoid having to notate keys like G# major and A# minor, A $\flat$  major and B $\flat$  minor being obviously easier to read. But Liszt, because in the oratorio he uses the signatures of both C# and D $\flat$ , must have reversed the instances of their use deliberately. This can be explained as the consequence of his key association – his wish to use the C# at a particular point in the narrative. Otherwise, to comply with the logic of notation, he should have written the *Miracle* music in D $\flat$ , and the end of *Tristis* in C#, where the use of the 7 sharps to express the tonic major would have been "correct".

*Christus*, in fact, uses all the key signatures of the comprehensive scheme outlined above, and is the only one of Liszt's works I have found which does. We should note the important exceptions: the completed scheme is not found in the *Faust* or *Dante Symphonies*, the oratorio *The Legend of St Elizabeth*, the *Gran Mass*, or the *B minor Sonata* – only in *Christus*. In *Christus*, and hence in Liszt's œuvre as a whole, the completed scheme involves the duplication of one key, namely D $\flat$ /C#, and a range of accidentals from 0 to 5 flats and 0 to 7 sharps. The double key signature, it should be noted, occurs exactly at the point in the cycle where flats change to sharps. (See ex. 4, *Liszt's key scheme*.)

It is significant that in *Christus* the key of C# major is associated with the actual person of Christ, because its duplicate key of D $\flat$  major appears twice in the oratorio with the same direct association. Apart from the instance already mentioned at the end of *Tristis est anima mea*, where it precedes Christ's death, D $\flat$  also occurs in the *March of the Three Kings* at the point where Christ is born. The March is in C minor, but at the Latin inscription beginning "*Et ecce stella*" [And, lo! the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was!] the key signature changes to 5 flats, and a new melody is introduced. The same



Example 4. Liszt's key scheme

134 un poco rall.

„Et ecce stella, quam viderant in Oriente, antecede-  
bat eos, usque dum veniens, staret supra, ubi erat Puer”  
Tranquillo assai (Matthaeus 2, 9.)

140 cantando sempre legato

145 G

Example 5a Christus. No. 5

melody is repeated later in the march with a key signature of 6#, F# major. (See *mus. examples 5a and 5b*.)

The figure of Christ here therefore unites in close proximity the three crucial keys in Liszt's cycle of fifths: D $\flat$ , C# and F#. They are brought into a dominant-tonic relationship.

In old English a traditional name for Christ is *Godman* (in French *L'Homme Dieu*, in Hungarian *Isten ember*). It seems to me that Liszt's use in the oratorio of these two keys enharmonically the same is a deliberate portrayal of this duality: D $\flat$  major is the human Christ, and C# major is the divine Christ. This is supported by the words of the D $\flat$  section at the end of *Tristis est anima mea*, "*sed non quod ego volo, sed quod tu*" [not what I will, but what thou wilt]. This Biblical scene, traditionally depicted in European art with the title *The Agony in the Garden*, is where Christ, knowing of his impending death, asks for the cup to be taken away. The Bible says he sweated drops of blood. At this point Christ is at his most human, hence the use here of the key of D $\flat$ , in contrast to the miracle scene earlier and the use of C#.

In Liszt's overall tonal scheme, *Christus* is the work in his output where the composer changes D $\flat$  into C#: the D $\flat$  is thereby enabled to function as the

277 M

283

290 *riten...* *molto* *Tempo I*

*espr.* *dim.* *pp legato* 8<sup>va</sup>

295 8<sup>va</sup> *m.s.*

Example 5b. Christus. No. 5

dominant of F#, and the problem of how to cross from the flats to the sharps is solved. The key of F#, as is evident from the examples of its use given earlier, can be seen to have an association in Liszt's œuvre, stated fairly explicitly in the title of the 3rd piece of the *Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses* – *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude*. This kind of thinking on Liszt's part can probably serve to explain why it was that he preferred the signature of 6 sharps to that of 6 flats, when both signatures represent what to all intents and purposes is the same key – at least on the piano.

The oratorio shows us how Liszt completed the unfinished sequence of keys found in the studies. He did not move on to the new key signature, but repeated the last one, the 5 flats key signature of the final two studies, writ-

ing the same tonality with its alternative key signature of 7 sharps. In other words, he *transformed* it. In the context of Liszt's overall tonal thinking, the transformation of D $\flat$  into C# is simply an application of his idea of thematic transformation – but to create a *tonal* transformation. And like the thematic transformation, it has a programmatic aspect. The dual identity of the key enables the musical progress of the key cycle to move in the direction of the divine. For, just as in Christianity Christ is the new covenant, so in *Christus* Liszt gives us his “new dominant”, the double-sided key signature which unblocks the path, and allows the music to pass smoothly from the flat side to the sharp side of the key system. Seeing the logic of this musical journey, we can understand something of how the adolescent prodigy at the piano in Paris became the composer in his fifties sitting at a much more dilapidated instrument in the Oratory of the Madonna del Rosario in Rome. Between stretches the road from C to F#.

My conclusion is that Liszt failed to complete the key cycle of the *Transcendental Studies* because (a) he did not want to write a study in G $\flat$  (b) he did not want to cross over abruptly from the flat side to the sharp side of the cycle without some form of transition. *Christus* can be seen here to be of crucial importance to the student of Liszt's use of tonality, as the work presents the composer's invention of the transition in a specific context. It is also evident that key association played a role in Liszt's tonal thinking. The *oratorio* is the only work by the composer which presents us with his completed key system in relation to the whole cycle of 5ths, and at the same time solves a problem germane to the tonal thinking of his whole output. In the year 2000 it is surely in this light that the inheritors of Liszt's legacy should be interpreting what the composer meant when he declared *Christus* to be his “musical will and testament”<sup>4</sup>.

## NOTES

1. H. Searle: *The Music of Liszt*. Dover Publications, New York 1966, 155.
2. *Ibid.* page 14.
3. *The Liszt Studies, including the first English edition of the legendary Liszt Pedagogue*, ed. and trans. Elyse Mach. New York 1973.
4. “...the entire [Hungarian] nation celebrated in 1873 his Jubilee, the fiftieth year of his artistic career. They played his magnificent oratorio *Christ*, which he called his »musical will and testament«, the words of which, drawn from the *Bible* and from the Catholic liturgy, were also composed by the master.” [Janka Wohl: *Franz Liszt. Recollections of a compatriot*, translated by B. Peyton Ward. London 1887, 24.]