

A LETTER TO PAUL MERRICK ABOUT HIS NEW BOOK

(David Butler Cannata)

PREAMBLE

In an email just yesterday, Mme. Mária Eckhardt explained the problems of bringing a review of Paul Merrick's recent book, *Liszt's Programmatic Use of Key* (Budapest, 2021), to the Hungarian audience. Hearing that I had written directly to the author of my admiration for his work, she asked if I might allow my views to be published *in lieu* thereof. I agreed immediately, ever conscious of the esteem in which I hold Mr. Merrick's scholarship, and the many gracious kindnesses I have enjoyed at her hand, and from all Hungarian Liszt scholars, all too numerous to mention. While the letter below remains Mr. Merrick's property, the words remain mine. I have excised a few, initial personal remarks (marked with an ellipsis), but I am happy to share my professional opinion with all, adding but a few references to make my inchoate ramblings something close to cogent. My thanks to the translator.

22 April 2023

Dear Paul,

[...]

At last, I can write to you with my CONGRATULATIONS upon your new book and your recent article from *The Hungarian Review*.¹ You were right, and it was rightly so, that your article was a plug for the book, but it is a wonderful introduction to a new reference volume that every Liszt scholar ought to have in their *Handbibliothek*. The article is a most delightful *amuse bouche* for the larger work, and I am delighted to have both. Thank you.

Only recently have I been able to digest *Liszt's Programmatic Use of Key*. And over these last two weeks your work has delighted me, challenged me, enchanted me, impressed me, and I am so grateful to you for bringing this forward at this time. I still wonder if *Intimatio Christi: Liszt's Musical Contemplations* (in preparation) is still inside me, but your work, of which I knew back many years ago, will definitely make my work easier and, hopefully, possible.

I know what it is like to venture upon such a topic. I have a paper/article on Tchaikovsky's use of key still unpublished.² But let us speak of you in this note. One thinks one will take only a small part of Liszt study, only to watch it explode into something outrageously enormous. But you managed to control it and present your ideas in a way so easily understood. As I have indicated above, and as with your previous tome,³ no scholar in Liszt studies, no Liszt *Handbibliothek* can be without it. The work will be seminal in the secondary literature, and I hope it sells magnificently well. [It may be ordered: www.argumentum.net/musicology – Editor's note.] I agree nearly 100% with your observations. Yes, C major represents our life here on earth (isn't it the key for musical beginners?); a minor, the relative, represents death; and with the key most distant, F#, we are in heaven itself. This is EXACTLY what I found with my work on Messiaen.⁴

Your sampling is of a goodly size, and the format/system reminded me of the methods of my *Doktorvater* Jan LaRue, as he contended with over 16,500 18th century symphonies. And then to concisely break down all the music into accessible units and then to associate connotations is only the work of slow, methodical study. Your scholarship and patience is of immeasurable value.

My pettifogs are few. Searle numbers! They are at least 23 years out of date. Better use the LW numbers of *Grove* 2000.

We should talk at some length of the use of the subdominant in 19th century music. Relatives (major and minor keys) are very important in the 19th century musical rhetoric. Think of Schumann's "*Imwunderschönen Monat Mai*," and the instability there of A major and F# minor. Such couplings in tonality actually come as early as Haydn and Beethoven and are in full bloom in Schubert. With that *Double-Tonic Complex* under his hand, Liszt could slither easily from one to the other leg of the coupled tonalities.⁵

And, personally, I am not sure that so much of Liszt's music is sans tonal. Sure, a key might be much less than implied, but more often than not I can reckon nebulous measures against a subsequent point of arrival. Much of his musical narratives are in a state of flux – are pieces ever finished? The way we may have readings that continue a musical thought over years, so we can have passages in the small dimension of any reading that might challenge some, should they be forcing his music to be as tonally inelastic as Brahms.⁶

But the whole is so splendid. Do not mistake my admiration for your work. It is truly seminal. I am so happy for you.

[...]

Most cordially yours,

David

NOTES

1. "Liszt, Hungary and the Key of F Sharp Major." *The Hungarian Review* XIV/1 (March 2023), 101-10.
2. "Tchaikovsky *sub rosa*," first read at the 15th Biennial International Conference on Nineteenth-Century Music, University College Dublin, IRELAND (25-28 June 2008) juxtaposes the *Double-Tonic Complex* of D major for Tchaikovsky's most incandescent works (for example the *Violin Concerto*, Op. 35, and the *grand ballabile* moments in any of the ballets) with the tenebrous and saturnine relative, B minor (for example his *Symphony VI*, Op. 74). One of the principal reasons that this paper has never appeared in print is that many presses in the musical secondary literature are still wary of working with Cyrillic.
3. Merrick's previous work in Liszt studies included his landmark *Revolution and Religion in the Music of Liszt* (Cambridge, 1987/2008).
4. See particularly, "Messiaen Reads the Infancy Gospels: The *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* as Christology." *Quomodo Cantabimus Canticum? Studies in Honor of Edward H. Roesner* (Middleton [WI], 2008), 235-78.
5. In *Richard Wagner: Prelude and Transfiguration from Tristan and Isolde* (New York, 1985). Robert Bailey, who coined the term *Double-Tonic Complex*, attributed its invention to Richard Wagner. But the phenomenon can be found in various ways, and in various guises, much earlier. The above Schumann example is but one case in point.
6. A cornerstone of much of the musicological discussion concerning the late 19th century rhetoric, remains, William Kinderman and Harold Krebs, eds. *The Second Practice of 19th Century Tonality* (Lincoln [NE], 1996).

CYPRIEN KATSARIS KITÜNTETÉSE

(Eckhardt Mária)

Most érkezett a hír: a Klassik Stiftung Weimar (Weimari Klasszika Alapítvány) és a Neue Liszt Stiftung (Új Liszt Alapítvány) idén Cyprien Katsarist, a ciprusi származású francia zongoraművészt tünteti ki „Franz-Liszt-Ehrenpreis” elnevezésű díjával. Ezt a díjat olyan kiváló művészek kaphatják meg, akik kiemelkedő érdemeket szereztek Liszt életművének megismertetéséért. Katsaris a hetedik a sorban, Alfred Brendel és Kurt Masur (2011), Leslie Howard (2017), Johannes és Eduard Kutrowatz (2019), valamint Martin Haselböck (2021) után. 2023. május 25-én ünnepélyes keretek között veszi át a díjat a weimari Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Főiskola (Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar) dísztermében. Thüringia miniszterelnöke, Bodo Ramelow köszöntője után a laudációt Dr. Nike Wagner, Liszt Ferenc ükunokája, a díjat odaítélő bizottság elnöke tartja, majd a kitüntetett művész zongoraestet ad.

Cyprien Katsarist mint Liszt zenéje iránt különösen elkötelezett, kiváló zongoraművészt Magyarországon is jól ismerjük. Szívesen jön hozzánk, gyakran koncertezik Budapesten. Legutóbb 2022. november 17-én a MÁV Szimfonikus Zenekarral lépett fel a Zeneakadémián, többek között Liszt *Magyar fantáziáját* játszotta, amelyet tizenöt évesen adott első zenekari koncertje óta tart repertoáron. Liszt Ferenc Társaságunk 1984-ben Nemzetközi Liszt Hanglemez Nagydíjban részesítette azt a felvételét, amelyen Lisztnek Beethoven *9. szimfóniájából* készített zongorapartitúráját szólaltatta meg.



AN AWARD FOR CYPRIEN KATSARIS

(Mária Eckhardt)

News has arrived that the Klassik Stiftung Weimar and the Neue Liszt Stiftung will this year award the French-Cypriot pianist Cyprien Katsaris the “Franz-Liszt-Ehrenpreis”. This prize is awarded to exceptional artists who have been outstanding in their service to increasing awareness of Liszt’s music. Katsaris is seventh in line following Alfred Brendel and Kurt Masur (2011), Leslie Howard (2017), Johannes and Eduard Kutrowatz (2019), and Martin Haselböck (2021). He will receive the award on May 25th 2023 at a special

ceremony in the main hall of the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar. After a greeting by the Minister-President of Thuringia Bodo Ramelow, the laudation speech will be delivered by the president of the prize-giving committee Dr. Nike Wagner, the great great granddaughter of Franz Liszt, after which the prize-winning artist will give a piano recital.

Cyprien Katsaris is well-known in Hungary as an outstanding pianist particularly dedicated to performing the music of Liszt. He likes to come here, and often gives concerts in Budapest. Most recently he appeared at the Music Academy on November 17th 2022 with the MÁV Symphony Orchestra, when among other things he played Liszt's *Hungarian Fantasy*, which he has kept in his repertoire ever since he played it at the age of fifteen in his first orchestral concert. In 1984 the Hungarian Liszt Society awarded his recording of Liszt’s piano transcription of Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony* with the International Grand Prix du Disque.