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Liszt's music in C major

In her book on key characteristics Rita Steblin presents extracts from theoretical writings concerned with the subject of key and its character.[1] These cover the period of her title, namely *c.*1700 to 1830. Her examples cover all the keys, providing a compendium of theoretical opinion on the subject – opinion which is by no means uniform. Theorists, not all of whom were composers, disagree on the character of keys, sometimes diametrically. For example, speaking of B major in 1692 Marc-Antoine Charpentier says it is 'Harsh and plaintive', while for Berlioz in 1844 it is 'noble, sonorous: radiant'.[2] Obviously over such a long period of history musical composition changed, influenced by countless factors, not the least of which is tuning and the development (if development is the right word) of harmonic thinking. Interestingly, very few of the theorists quote real music by real composers (the Berlioz quotation is uncharacteristic in that, as a composer, he obviously offered in his theoretical writing a composer's opinion). An exception is D major, where nearly all the writers say it is martial, uplifting, associated with the trumpet, and after the middle of the 18th century increasingly refer to Handel and use the word 'hallelujahs'. By comparison the humble key of C fairs less well. The first entry in Steblin's book, again from Charpentier in 1692, says it is 'Gay and militant', while for Berlioz it is 'Grave; but dull and vague'.[3] A greater contrast can hardly be imagined.

It is part of the general picture of musical history that as the 19th century approached, progressed and departed, the tendency was for composers to prefer more of the 'black notes', with the result that in 1874, for example, the world's most popular piano concerto came to be written in B♭ minor, a key previously unheard of for symphonic music. Elgar's First Symphony is still the only example of the genre in the repertoire to be in the key of A♭ major – not even Haydn, the keys of whose symphonies traverse far wider tonal boundaries than Mozart's, wrote one in that key, although he did use the four-flats key-signature in his Symphony no.49 in F minor. Wagner, of course, immortalised B major in *Tristan* and ended the *Ring* in D♭ major, having earlier made his Gods ascend to Valhalla in G♭ major. These extremes – and there are obviously countless examples – have led us to see the process as one of increasing chromaticism leading to so-called atonality at the beginning of the 20th century. The impression has remained that these composers were not interested in C major, with its absence of harmonic richness. But such opinions rest on a quite distorted picture. Wagner's opera *Siegfried* ends with a long duet in C from Brünnhilde's awakening onwards (other keys

1. Rita Steblin: *A history of key characteristics in the 18th and early 19th centuries*, 2nd edition (Rochester, NJ, 2002).

2. ibid., p.35 (Charpentier), p.143 (Berlioz).

3. ibid.

intervene, but C major always returns); in *Meistersinger* the overture, opening church scene with chorale, final prize song of Walther followed by Sachs's long solo, and the huge final chorus to 'die heil'ge deutsche Kunst' are in C; and in *Parsifal* the march to the Holy Grail and the end of Act I are also in C. None of these Wagner examples accord with Berlioz's dictum, yet the two composers were contemporaries, both 19th-century 'Romantics', both wrote what could be loosely called 'programme music', both were orchestral geniuses, and both were modern harmonists. But Wagner, whose copious writings cover every conceivable subject to do with things other than music, expressed no verbal opinions on C major. His opinion is in his music.

With respect to Charpentier, we have to say the same was true even in 1692. If we want to discover the character of a key, we can only find it in music written in that key. By itself, as a theoretical concept, key cannot have character. Keys, for example major keys, are simply transpositions. D♭ major is C major transposed up a semitone. Whether we notate it as D♭, like Chopin in the 'Raindrop' Prelude, or C♯, like Bach in the *Well-tempered clavier*, may to a theorist be a matter of indifference. But this is not at all so for composers. Steblin quotes Anton Reicha (1770–1836), who was the young Liszt's teacher in Paris, on the enharmonic keys of G♭ and F♯:

> The keys of F♯ and G♭, which are seldom used and which are one and the same key on the piano, are consequently very different in their nature; the former is very brilliant or piercing, while the latter is very sombre. [...]
>
> This observation is important in the case of enharmonic transitions, because, when the key of F♯ is suddenly changed into [...] G♭ we fall [...] into a very sombre key [...] On the piano, this difference is little felt; but in the orchestra it can produce bad effects, completely contrary to the intention of the composer. [*Traité de mélodie*, 1814][4]

Reicha's treatise was translated into German by Czerny, with whom Liszt had studied the piano in Vienna before going to Paris. Czerny adds a footnote: 'Even on the piano, a composer of fantasy and finer feelings can make the peculiar observation that, for example, in composing an Adagio in [...] G♭ major, completely different ideas occur to him, and the piece takes on a totally different character (a different colour), than if he writes it in [...] F♯ major.'[5] This is interesting in that Czerny, like Liszt, was both a pianist and a composer, and in this extract he talks about both aspects of his musicianship. Clearly, to write music in six flats instead of six sharps may suggest different emotional worlds, but can the pianist make the chord of G♭ sound different from the chord of F♯? Presumably not if played alone – only if it occurs in the context of a piece with a certain character. What emerges here, for both Reicha and Czerny, is that F♯ and G♭ are not the same key at all. Of interest is the fact that Liszt studied with both, and was therefore educated in the kind of thinking that these two musicians display – namely that key has character.

4. ibid., p.131.

5. ibid., p.132.

The character of key must have been a part of what he thought about when he both played and composed.

The keys of Liszt's works are not given in the catalogues of his music.[6] The set of 12 symphonic poems composed at Weimar are displayed in them with only their titles – yet three of them, *Les Préludes*, *Orpheus*, and *Festklänge*, are in C major, a perhaps surprising choice of key for the arch-Romantic Liszt. A fourth example can be added if we include the '13th' symphonic poem, the late work *From the cradle to the grave*, which travels from C major to C♯ major. Also, the two symphonic poems that begin in C minor, namely *Tasso* and *Hunnenschlacht*, both end with their 'trionfo' in C major – and in the 'programme' both are in Rome. To this should be added the C minor symphony – *Faust* – which ends with the 'Chorus mysticus' in C major, in which a tenor solo sings the words 'Das Ewigweibliche zieht uns hinan'. Already we are beginning to see the outline of a 'programmatic' character of the key which is totally at variance with Berlioz's portrait.

The work by Liszt whose only system of arrangement is the sequence of keys is the set of *12 transcendental studies* S139 for piano. The initial idea of the youthful composer was to copy Bach, and compose his own '48', along the lines of the *Well-tempered Clavier*. Thus insofar as the set was conceived as a whole before the individual items were composed, the work may be said to be 'cyclic'. A full set of 48 would, of course, have involved presenting twice, as in Bach's two books, a complete set of the 24 keys that constitute the tonal cycle. The number 24 is not affected by enharmonic coincidence, for example the necessity of deciding whether to notate a certain key as D♭ or C♯.

Unlike Bach, Liszt did not progress chromatically up the semitones, pairing the major with its tonic minor as C major C minor, C♯ major C♯ minor and so on, but followed a sequence ascending numerically through the flats, thus C, F, B♭, E♭, A♭, D♭. Each major key is followed by its relative minor, which means that a signature is used twice consecutively, for example three flats is E♭ major then C minor. Liszt followed this sequence as far as five flats D♭ major and B♭ minor, at which point the set goes no further. Thus all the signatures are flats, there are no sharps. A full set of 24 studies, of course, would at some point have had to cross over to the sharps. To continue the established key sequence the next study – number 13 – would have had to be in either six flats or six sharps. For some reason Liszt left unresolved the question of how to continue. The study he sketched but never completed is in F♯ major.[7]

The first version of these studies was published in 1826. They were

6. The three most widely used Liszt catalogues are the Raabe (Peter Raabe: *Franz Liszt: Leben und Schaffen*, Stuttgart 1931, rev.2/1968 by F. Raabe), Searle ('Liszt, Franz', in *New Grove*, 1980) and Mueller/Eckhardt ('Liszt, Franz: Works', in *New Grove*, 2nd edition, 2001), none of which give keys. There seems to be no agreed rationale among catalogue makers concerning this question. For example, taking the *New Grove* as the source, the Berlioz catalogue has no keys, the Chopin and Schumann have keys for the instrumental music but not the songs, the Mendelssohn the same but also has keys for some of the church works. The Schubert has keys for most of his music, including all the songs, but omits them for the secular choral works. Moving backwards in history, the Haydn catalogue has the keys – even for his folksong arrangements – but not for the secular choral works, while the Handel has no keys for his secular choral works, or for his many songs (in three languages, Italian, French and English). Seeing as song might well be a starting point for studying key and content, particularly in the 19th century – even allowing for the various versions and transpositions found in this genre – clearly not all catalogues give the information required to make them a useful research tool.

7. This information is given for the 1826 version of the studies, catalogue number A8, in the new work list compiled by R. Charnin Mueller & Maria Eckhardt ('Liszt, Franz', in *New Grove*, 2nd edition). Regarding Liszt's attitude to the cycle of keys and the identity of F♯ major with G♭ major, see Paul Merrick: 'G flat or F sharp?: the cycle of keys in Liszt's music', in *Liszt 2000: selected lectures given at the International Liszt Conference in Budapest, May 18–20, 1999* (Budapest, 2000).

revised in 1839, and again in 1853 – at which time Liszt gave some of them titles. As the key sequence was determined, there was clearly some connection between the key and the character of the music. In this connection it is of interest that Liszt composed a completely new study in E♭ major, which he called 'Eroica'. It is impossible he did not think of Beethoven's Third Symphony. Another Beethoven association would seem to be the title 'Paysage' for the study in F – clearly a contribution to the 'pastoral' character of F major. The title of the C minor study, which ends in C major, is 'Wilde Jagd' – the German version of *Le Chasseur maudit*, or 'The accursed huntsman', familiar from the symphonic poem by César Franck. In this story, a hunter rides by on the Sabbath day pursued by demons. The priest prays for his soul. In the poem by the German poet Gottfried August Bürger (1747–94) which Franck used as the programme for his piece, and which Liszt may also have known, there is no redemption:

> Be chased for ever through the wood;
> For ever roam the affrighted wild;
> And let thy fate instruct the proud,
> God's meanest creature is his child.

Liszt's study, by ending in the major, clearly seeks to contradict this verse – his huntsman is saved, in this being brought into line with his *Faust* and *Tasso*. What concerns us here is why Liszt should have chosen C major rather than another key for salvation.

Out of 500 or so works by Liszt that I have examined from the aspect of their key,[8] over 30 are in either C major, or begin in C minor to end in C major. In my numbered list that follows, the 'S' numbers are those of the Searle catalogue [i.e. the ones generally found on published scores and recordings of Liszt's music]. The sign → means the work is cyclic i.e. consists of several items or movements which can be listed individually by key. Hence the *Faust symphony* is both an entity in C minor, and a set of three independent symphonic poems plus chorus – 'Faust' in C minor, 'Gretchen' in A♭ major, 'Mephistopheles' in C minor and 'Chorus mysticus' in C major. (Individual items are put under the genre of the overall whole.)

8. The quantity of Liszt's works varies in the different catalogues, depending on how they are numbered – for example, whether individual items in a group, set or cycle are considered separately. Basically there are around 1000 Liszt works, of which approximately half are 'arrangements' in some form or another. Obviously in Liszt of all composers this is a difficult category to define – we think of *La Campanella* as Liszt rather than an arrangement of Paganini – but even so there is the category 'original works'. I have examined around 500 of these – basically all of them – and listed them by key.

C major

Choral

01	C	*Baptisma* (from 08)
02	C	*Credo* (from 030)
03	C	*Credo* (from the *Gran Mass* S9)
04	C	*Gloria* (from the *Hungarian coronation mass* S11)
05	C	*Ordo* (from 08)
06	C	*Pax vobiscum* S64
07	C	*Psalm 116* S15a

08	C→F♯	*Septem sacramenta* S52 [1. 'Baptisma' 2. 'Confirmatio' 3. 'Eucharistia' 4. 'Poenitentia' 5. 'Extrema unctio' 6. 'Ordo' 7. 'Matrimonium']

Song

09	C	*Weimars Volkslied* S313

Orchestral

010	C	*Chorus mysticus* (from 033)
011	C	*Festklänge* S101
012	C→C♯	*From the cradle to the grave* (Symphonic poem no.13) S107 [1. 'The cradle' 2. 'The struggle for existence' 3. 'The grave: the cradle of the future life']
013	C	*Les Préludes* (Symphonic poem no.3) S97
014	C	*Orpheus* (Symphonic poem no.4) S98
015	C	*The cradle* (from 012)

Piano

016	C→B	*Années de pélèrinage* I, *Suisse* S160 [1. 'Chapelle de Guillaume Tell' 2. 'Au Lac de Wallenstadt' 3. 'Pastorale' 4. 'Au bord d'une source' 5. 'Orage' 6. 'Vallée d'Obermann' 7. 'Eglogue' 8. 'Le mal du pays' 9. 'Les cloches de Genève']
017	C	*Bülow-Marsch* S230
018	C	*Chapelle de Guillaume Tell* (from 016)
019	C	*Festvorspiel* S226
020	C	*God save the queen* S235
021	C	*Huldigungsmarsch* S228
022	C	*Hussitenlied* S234
023	CF♯	*In festo transfigurationis* S188
024	C	*Pater noster* S173.5 (choral version S21.2)
025	C	*Preludio* (from 027)
026	Ca	*Toccata* S197a
027	C→b♭	*Transcendental studies* S139 [1. 'Preludio' 2. 'A minor' 3. 'Paysage' 4. 'Mazeppa' 5. 'Feux follets' 6. 'Vision' 7. 'Eroica' 8. 'Wilde Jagd' 9. 'Ricordanza' 10. 'F minor' 11. 'Harmonies du soir' 12. 'Chasse-neige']

C minor–major

Choral

028	cC	*Die heilige Cäcilia* S5
029	cC	*Dies irae* (from Requiem S12)
030	c→C	*Mass for male voices and organ* S8 [1. Kyrie 2. Gloria 3. Credo. 4. Sanctus 5. Agnus Dei]
031	cC	*Psalm 137* S17
032	cC	*The bells* (from *The bells of Strasbourg Cathedral* S6)

Orchestral

033	c→C	*Faust symphony* [1. 'Faust' 2. 'Gretchen' 3. 'Mephistopheles' (and 'Chorus mysticus')]
034	cC	*Hunnenschlacht* (Symphonic poem no.11) S105
035	cC	*Tasso* (Symphonic poem no.2) S96
036	cC	*The three holy kings* (March) (from oratorio *Christus* S3)

Piano
037 cC *Wilde Jagd* (no.8 from 027)

Organ
038 cC *Fantasy and fugue on Ad nos ad salutarem undam* S259

The story of the huntsman chased by demons in 037 is matched by the programmatic content of 032, which describes the attempt of Lucifer and his angels in a C minor storm to destroy the bells of Strasbourg Cathedral – which they cannot, as they are sanctified. The work ends with the Te Deum in C major. To storm of course means to attack, an idea found in 034, in which Attila and his horde of Huns are attacking Rome. Again they are 'storming' the sacred city in C minor – whose Christian salvation is represented by the plainsong hymn *Crux fidelis* in C major. In a letter to his English pupil Walter Bache Liszt wrote of the piece that it was based on: 'the legend that warriors, after their death, continue fighting incessantly as spirits. In the middle of the picture appears the Cross and its mystic light; on this my 'Symphonic Poem' is founded. The chorale "Crux Fidelis", which is gradually developed, illustrates the idea of the final victory of Christianity in its effectual love to God and man.'[9]

The idea of a C minor/C major journey ending in a chorale is found in 035, where Liszt transforms the minor mode Gondolier's song he uses as the theme of the work into a hymn-like melody in the major mode. The subject of the symphonic poem is the melancholy story of the Italian Renaissance poet Tasso, who in real life suffered neglect and madness. Eventually he became Italy's national poet, and was summoned to Rome to be honoured by the pope. The title of Tasso's most celebrated work, *Gerusalemme liberata*, describes the salvation of the holy city from the Turks, and the Venetian gondolier's song on which Liszt based his music was sung to words from the poem. Thus Liszt links the key of his symphonic poem to both Rome and Jerusalem. Another C major chorale ending is found in 038. As in *The battle of the Huns*, the work begins with 'stormy' C minor premonitions ('minorised' thematic material) of the chorale – here the chorale sung by the Anabaptists in Meyerbeer's opera *Le Prophète* – that later appears in its 'correct' version in C major. All of these pieces celebrate 'the final victory of Christianity' Liszt speaks of in his letter.

THIS LEADS US to those works in C major which are settings of religious texts, in particular the Mass and psalms. 030 was Liszt's earliest setting of the Mass, begun in 1846. The Kyrie in C minor passes to C major at the Credo, a tonal change referred to at the end of the work when Liszt quotes a Credo plainsong melody for the C major Dona nobis pacem. Here Liszt seems to be stating his belief in peace at a time – 1848 to 1849 – when Europe

9. *Letters of Franz Liszt*, trans. Constance Bache (London, 1894), vol.2, p.352, 'To Walter Bache' (25 May 1879).

was in turmoil. The C major chorale of 038 was also composed at this time. In his Requiem S12 Liszt moves from C minor to C major in the Dies irae (029) at the words 'dona eis requiem' that end the Pie Jesu. 04 and 07 are part of the *Hungarian coronation mass* S11, a work in E♭ major. Psalm 116 [117], the Gradual, is short, its mood parallelling that of the Gloria:

> Praise the Lord all nations!
> Extol him, all peoples!
> For great is his steadfast love toward us;
> And the faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever.
> Praise the Lord!

Psalm 137 (031) is 'By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion'. The C minor opening changes to C major at the mention of Jerusalem: 'If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!' Here there is a parallel with the Jerusalem of *Tasso*. Related to the church works is *Die heilige Cäcilia* (028), a setting of a French poem by Émilie de Girardin describing the saint's marytrdom in second-century Rome. Liszt uses a plainsong antiphon for St Cecilia as a kind of cantus firmus which he varies throughout the piece. C major appears at the end when reference is made to the month of November, when 'on va célébrer cette sainte par des concerts'. The key appears at the word 'concerts', and continues to the end with the poem's 'Tous les arts lui rendent homage'.

Here the mention of concerts takes us away from the Church back to the secular world, a transition effected via the patron saint of music, who for Liszt not only bridges the two worlds, but also provides a link with 'all the arts'. As we have seen, this link is found in *Tasso*, whose life has nothing to do with music, but does have a connection with the Church. The obverse of this is *Orpheus* (014) who as Greek myth pre-dates the Church, but who symbolises the art of music. Interestingly Liszt brings his symphonic poem into a sacred context when he refers in his preface to 'le caractère sereinement civilisateur des chants [...] leur élèvement graduel comme des vapeurs d'encens', a passage in his 'programme' that exactly describes the final bars of the piece with their chords 'rising like incense'.

Connected to the theme of arts and homage is the little-known *Huldigungs-marsch* (021), composed for the inauguration of Prince Carl Alexander, heir to the throne in Sachsen Weimar, in August 1853. Belonging also to the topic are *Weimars Volkslied* (09), a song about the great figures of Weimar's past, and arguably the march for Hans von Bülow (017), who had married Liszt's daughter Cosima and was revered by Liszt as a great musician. Outside Weimar we may add two patriotic pieces, 020 and 022, the first an opulent version of the English national anthem, the second an arrangement of a song about John Huss composed in the 1820s, but which in the 19th century was believed to be of 15th-century origin. In 1830 the young Liszt had intended

the melody for his sketched revolutionary symphony of that year, but in the end arranged it for piano in 1840. The text celebrates the leader of the Hussites, and thus combines Christian, national and revolutionary ingredients. The patron saint of Bohemia (today the Czech Republic) also appears: 'Bitte du für uns, heil'ger Wenceslaus, Du Fürst des Böhmerlands!'. The saint died a martyr's death in 929, and is honoured as the defender of a Christian Bohemia against pagan opposition.

In 1853 Liszt composed the seventh symphonic poem, *Festklänge* (011), which received its first performance in 1854 as the prelude to Schiller's play *Huldigung der Künste*. As there is no printed programme to this work we can only speculate regarding its content and what connection it may have to the key of C major. Tradition has it that the work was composed for the planned wedding of Liszt and the Princess Wittgenstein, which at the time looked imminent. Part of the evidence for this speculation is the presence of a polonaise in the middle, taken to be a portrait of the Polish princess. But it is worth remarking that for 19th-century musicians, and hence for Liszt, the polonaise did not have only Polish associations.

The most prolific composer of orchestral polonaises was Jozef Kozlowski (1757–1831), a Pole who moved to St Petersburg and in 1799 became inspector of music to the city's Imperial Theatres. He composed over 200 polonaises, one of which, written for the 1791 celebration of Catherine II's victory over the Turks, was until 1833 the Russian national hymn sung to the words 'Thunder of victory, resound!'. The success of this work made it the model for later polonaises by Russian composers, some of which – by Tchaikovsky, for example – perpetuate its association with the Russian nobility. In which case, as Liszt's only orchestral polonaise, there is the possibility of a similar association in *Festklänge*. If we take the year 1853, and the accession of Carl Alexander, then the celebratory character of the work might be related to this event. The Duke's mother, Maria Pavlovna, was the sister of Tsar Nicholas II, and Liszt's major patron at Weimar – it was she who persuaded Liszt to settle there in 1848 and direct the musical life of the court and the town. When she died in 1859 court support for music declined. But the 'coronation' of 1853 opened a new era of optimism, which the symphonic poem clearly reflects. If the polonaise is a Russian association, then Liszt is celebrating his patron and her son. The coincidence of the key of C with that of the *Huldigungsmarsch*, plus the 'homage' theme of Schiller's play, links the two works via the year 1853, and the idea of the arts and patronage. In this sense it is an occasion for music to celebrate itself – its future continuance in the Weimar that Liszt envisioned to be the new ideal for his artistic age. As if to confirm this, he next composed *Orpheus*. If we add to these the revision of *Les Préludes* (013) which took place around the same time, then in 1853–54 Liszt worked on three symphonic poems in C major.

Les Préludes is Liszt's most famous work in C major and many pages of argumentation have been written about its programmatic content, and whether there is any real connection with Lamartine.[10] For our present purposes it can be said that there is definitely a connection between the title 'prelude' and the key of C major. 'Preludio' is the title of the first transcendental study (025), obviously because it is the beginning of a set. But it is also true that Liszt chose to begin his key scheme with C major – in doing so following established tradition. C is the *first* key. Therefore Liszt uses it for 'first things'. This is itself a category, which includes the following works:

Baptisma (01)
The cradle (015)
Chapelle de Guillaume Tell (018)
Festvorspiel (019)
Pater noster (024)

01, 015 and 019 are self-evident. 018 is the first piece in book 1 of *Années de pélèrinage* (016), a set of nine pieces outlining a tonal journey from C major to B major, a journey that begins in a church.[11] 024 is Christianity's 'first prayer' because it was taught by Christ – also the earlier choral version of the piece dating from 1845 was Liszt's first church composition. 015 begins the 13th symphonic poem describing life's journey, the cradle obviously having a close connection with baptism (01). The whole point about the symphonic poem *Les Préludes* is that it portrays this life as a prelude to the afterlife – what Liszt in his programme calls the great Amen – and this is expressed in the choice of key. The religious setting the key signifies is illustrated by Liszt's use of C major for baptism and holy orders (05) in *Septem sacramenta* (08) – a cycle of seven pieces which outline a tonal journey from C to F♯.

The F♯ sacrament is *Matrimonium*. Here we should take a theological view of matrimony rather than a biographical view to do with Liszt and his relationship with women. St Thomas Aquinas, writing in the 13th century, expressed the serious content that Liszt's choice of key reflects: 'Matrimony is the seventh Sacrament. It is a sign of the union between Christ and the Church. [...] the indivisibility of Matrimony [...] shows forth the indivisible union of Christ and His Church.'[12]

This F♯ association with Christ found here at the end of seven pieces occurs also in a single piece *In festo transfigurationis* (023), which begins in C and ends in F♯. This reflects the story of the transfiguration as narrated in the New Testament: 'Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain. There his appearance was changed before their eyes. A cloud formed, covering them in a shadow, and from this cloud came this word, 'This is my Son. The Beloved; listen to him.' [Mk 9:2, 7].

The medieval name for Jesus was Godman – man and God in one. Christ

10. Contrasting examples of such writings are E. Haraszti: 'Genèse des Préludes de Liszt qui n'ont aucun rapport avec Lamartine', in *Revue de Musicologie* xxvii (1953), pp.111–40, and A. Main: 'Liszt after Lamartine: "Les Préludes" ', in *Music & Letters* lx (1979), pp.133–148.

11. The first of the nine pieces is entitled *Chapelle de Guillaume Tell*. William Tell's Chapel is a real church in Switzerland near Sisikon. The current chapel was constructed in 1879; the original is said to date from 1388, having been built at the place where according to legend Tell escaped from the bailiff Gessler's boat. The chapel became a place of pilgrimage from the 16th century on. Liszt uses music – a complete theme with harmony – composed in 1825 and marked 'Adagio religioso', his earliest surviving piano music in C major. The autograph survives, at present in the Jagiellonian library in Krakow. See W. Wright: 'Master Liszt in England', in *Journal of the American Liszt Society* LIV/LV/LVI 2003-2005 [Laires Festschrift], pp.24–44.

12. Thomas Aquinas: *De articulis fidei et Ecclesiae sacramentis*; English text at *www.intratext.com/X/ENG0029.htm*.

has two natures, the human and the divine. At the Transfiguration he showed the disciples his divine nature. This Liszt reflects in the key relationship of C and F♯, beginning with the human and ending with the divine. He does the same in the C major Credo (03) from the *Gran Mass*, where F♯ major appears at the 'et incarnatus est' in a musical phrase that pivots from F♯ to C and back to F♯. The central position of this event in the movement can be seen from the sequence of keys (with their signatures) used by Liszt:

Credo (from *Gran Mass* S9) C F B F♯ D F♯–C–F♯ B E♭ E C D C B C

In Liszt's Mass the Incarnation, where God becomes Man, is where F♯ 'enters C'. Liszt here makes his point – the 'black notes' are *in* the 'white notes' just as notated keys or tonalities 'emerge' as accidentals, or modifications of the naturals, because they are 'from' them (which they are, stemming as they do from the medieval desire to preserve the diatonic major hexachord – the 'white notes' - in transposed positions, thus necessitating a notation for 'two Bs' – notation which later became the sharp and flat accidentals applicable across the board). Liszt was not a musicologist and doubtless knew little about the history of notation, but his logic, derived from his everyday experience of living in the musical world of his time – a world consisting entirely of notated harmony – puts a theological interpretation on the question of where the black notes 'came from'. He is suggesting that C major is like the womb of tonality – its 'incarnation'. In this sense it is a beginning that is also its 'end'. Liszt's 'programmatic' tonality resembles the Aristotelean teleology found in medieval scholastic theologians like Aquinas and Duns Scotus, whose system is based on the four causes. Liszt's C major is like their material cause and final cause – Aristotle's marble and the statue itself. And the other keys – 'revealed' – follow on like St Thomas's caused accidents. Indeed, in scholastic Trinitarian language, Liszt's use of the other keys in relation to C major looks very much like a kind of 'unitas in essentia'.

This – to one whose tonal thinking is such – makes key inescapable. Liszt seems to acknowledge this reality in the *Faust symphony* (033), where he makes C major the key that defeats Mephistopheles, whose demise (without key signature) in the third movement is 'atonal'.[13] It is followed by complete silence (the bar before the Andante mistico), out of which there emerge quiet chords of C major sung to the words of Goethe's 'Chorus mysticus': 'All that is transitory / Is but a likeness / The unfulfilled / Here is attained; / The inexpressible / Here is accomplished / The eternal feminine / Still leads us on.'

Why C major should be the key in which we are led on by the eternal feminine may itself be a theological concept on Liszt's part, related precisely to the Incarnation. Certainly in the oratorio *Christus* the Epiphany – the manifestation of the Saviour to the Three Kings, celebrated in the Church on

13. The passage in the 'Mephistopheles' movement of the *Faust symphony* where tonality 'dissolves' (letter Ww in the score) refers to Liszt's 'no key' idea (*sans ton*). Liszt uses silence after it to bridge the gap between keylessness and the C major choral ending – an 'invisible' change in the signature. See P. Merrick: 'Liszt's *sans ton* key signature', in *Studia Musicologica* 45/3–4 (2004), pp.281–302.

6 January – is expressed by him at the end of the march (036) in the key of C. If we were to try and reverse the Christmas 'birth' idea – if we could rewind the video – we would arrive back at where the baby came from. For example the C major of Liszt's *Cradle* (015) is clearly meant to convey the idea of the immortal soul arriving as a baby – the ending of the work (012), *The cradle of the future life*, repeats the cradle music transposed into C♯ major. But in the central section, 'The struggle for existence', Liszt tells us there is no rewind – the route lies forward via a strong outline of the three-note motive Liszt associated with the Cross. Liszt's tonal 'afterlife' presented in the 13th symphonic poem is reached programmatically via the C major 'triumph' of *Crux fidelis* in the eleventh symphonic poem, *Hunnenschlacht* (034). The *Crux fidelis* plainsong melody in this work is the source of the three-note figure which occurs in other works by Liszt as a musical emblem – called the *Tonisches Symbol des Kreuzes* in a note at the end of the score of the oratorio *The Legend of St Elizabeth*. This 'Cross motive' matches the 'programme' of Liszt's letter about *Hunnenschlacht* to Walter Bache – 'the final victory of Christianity in its effectual love to God and man'. In a word, the Passion.

Can we, from what we have seen, articulate the character of Liszt's C major? In the order so far presented, its musical subjects are: Church; Rome; Jerusalem; Praise; St Cecilia; Music; Arts; Homage; Patria; First things; This life; Sacrament; Incarnation; Final end; The Cross. What single word can sum these up? There may be one, but without its assistance we can still declare unequivocally that Liszt's C major, instead of being the least significant of the keys, emerges in his music as the most important. It is the conveyor of all music – the guarantor of the major-minor tonal system. It is the rock on which it rests. Liszt said of his C major Credo in the male-voice Mass (02): 'The Credo, as if built on a rock, should sound as steadfast as the dogma itself.'[14]

Liszt himself seems to have summed up the character of his C major in a religious context in 1885, the year before he died, when he composed *Pax vobiscum* (06) for men's voices. The piece, which is short and simple, sets the two Latin words uttered by priests at the kiss of peace after the consecration in the Mass. They echo Christ's words in John chapter 14 verse 27: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you.'

14. *Letters of Franz Liszt*, trans. Constance Bache (London, 1894), vol.1, p.315, 'To Johann von Herbeck' (received 12 January 1857).

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