Performance practice in Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies: A comparison of the Liszt-Pupil recordings of Hungarian Rhapsody No.12

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Performance Practice in Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies:
A Comparison of the Liszt-Pupil Recordings of Hungarian Rhapsody No.12

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Bachelor of Music Honours
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Abstract

Despite their enduring popularity as concert works, Franz Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies have never won favour with the critics. Played in a literal, score-bound fashion these works can indeed offer little more than fodder for the performing pony. Nevertheless, through performances that successfully capture the spirit of this music—many of which are captured on early recordings—these works are vibrant, powerful, and stirring.

This dissertation explores the performance style associated with these works. At the centre of this study is a comparative analysis of seven recordings of Hungarian Rhapsody No.12 made by the following Liszt pupils: Arthur Friedheim, Arthur de Greef, Alfred Reisenauer, Emil von Sauer, Alexander Siloti, Bernhard Stavenhagen, and Josef Weiss. The findings from this analysis will be discussed alongside written sources concerning Liszt’s approach to performance in general, questioning how that approach might apply to the Hungarian Rhapsodies with their distinct musical language (known as the Style hongrois).
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Introduction

Franz Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies are a collection of nineteen works for solo piano that evoke the style and spirit of Hungarian Gypsy music.

Despite their enduring popularity as concert works, Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies tend to be labelled as cheap, shallow, and superficial show-off pieces.¹ Many performers fail to see past the surface of the glittering cadenzas and grand sonorities—and immediately place any music that makes such luxuriant use of its instrument in the category of frivolous and contrived showmanship. If they do venture to play them, invariably for the want of creating a public spectacle of their own faultless keyboard technique—they treat the expansive ornamentation and floratura, that absolutely characteristic part of the Hungarian Gypsy style, as ingenuine and meaningless fireworks, and use Liszt’s ingenious textures and effects as if their sole purpose were for the deconstruction of pianos. But what if they were to look further, beyond the prehistoric prejudices perpetuated by the piano-playing public?

Liszt wrote endlessly, in rose-coloured prose, about the depth of poetry, sentiment, and feeling which he found in the music of the Hungarian Gypsies.² It so moved him that he spent much of his life studying it, the culmination of those efforts being the Hungarian Rhapsodies.³ When played with stylistic sympathy and understanding—with the kind of “fire, flexibility, dash, undulation, verve, and fantastic caprice”⁴ described by Liszt—the Hungarian Rhapsodies are revealed to be some of the most vibrant, colourful, fantastic, evocative, witty, charming, exciting, and effective music in the piano repertoire.

Through the study of recordings by pupils of the composer, this dissertation aims to get closer to an understanding Liszt’s expectations for players of the Hungarian Rhapsodies. As a group the pupils of Liszt left approximately twenty-two recordings of various Hungarian Rhapsodies, and seven of these are recordings of Rhapsody No.12.⁵

This situation offers a unique opportunity for side-by-side comparative analysis. In order to facilitate this I have created a matrix of six staves (Appendix),⁶ allowing the reader to both follow the interpretation of individual performers and to compare interpretations bar-by-bar. As Liszt identifies extreme tempo flexibility and extended use of ornamentation to be particular characteristics of

¹ This reception will be discussed in Chapter 1.
³ See Liszt, Gipsy in Music. 333-338.
⁴ Ibid, 305.
⁵ Plus two duplicates on which the same pianist recorded the same piece on different format. See Discography.
⁶ The recording by Bernhard Stavenvagen has not been included in the Appendix as its alterations are of a nature that defy analysis in this format.
Hungarian Gypsy performance, it is these elements that will be examined. The analytical findings will be discussed in comparison with various literary sources—particularly the passages relating to performance in Liszt’s monograph Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie.

Part A is an overview of the background and context behind the Hungarian Rhapsodies. Chapter 1 will briefly summarise the background to the composition and publication of the works. Chapter 2 is an outline of Liszt’s descriptions of Hungarian Gypsy music and performance. Chapter 3 is a short history of reception of the Rhapsodies since their publication, comparing the opinions of various writers.

Part B includes detailed discussions of each individual recording (Chapter 4), followed by a discussion that aims to contextualise the trends found. Chapter 5 focuses on textual alteration and Chapter 6 on tempo flexibility. A short conclusion will bring together the findings, offering some observations for present-day players of the Rhapsodies.

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In the past few decades, we have seen a growing interest in the revival of performance practices of nineteenth-century musicians, and the study of Liszt’s approach to musical performance continues to gain attention—not merely in his own works, but also in how he interpreted the works of others. In this area, a study of the Hungarian Rhapsodies poses a more complex question. We are speaking of how Liszt interpreted, compositionally, the music he heard in Hungary. This music, characterised by “rhythmic freedom, declamation, exaggerated articulations, and noisier, jangling tone,” carries its own performance traditions, which Liszt tried to capture in notation with more or less precision. Players of Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies, therefore, must have some understanding of two broad styles: the first being the “authentic” Hungarian Gypsy practices; the second being Liszt’s own practices and expectations.

Liszt’s pre-eminence as the musical figurehead of his era resulted in a vast collection of writings about various aspects of his art—not least his approach to piano performance. The primary sources exist in the form of:

Liszt’s own writings, both published and unpublished:

- His books: *Life of Chopin* and *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie*
- Various published articles
- Various prefaces and footnotes in published scores
- Letters to friends, students, and colleagues

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7 In this context, “ornamentation” is used to refer to textual alterations and other departures from Liszt’s text.
Writings of the pupils and colleagues of Liszt about his playing and teaching practices, in the form of memoirs, treatises, and diary notes:

- The *Liszt-Pädagogium*\(^{10}\): a “collection of notes assembled by Lina Ramann [Liszt’s “official” biographer] containing Liszt’s instruction for his own works, itself based on contemporary notes by pianists present at Liszt’s masterclasses.”\(^{11}\)
- Friedheim, Lachmund, Siloti, Lamond, Göllerich, Amy Fay, von Sauer, Rosenthal, Mason, Borodin and others.\(^{12}\)
- “Second generation pupils” (students of students of Liszt): Arrau, Fleishmann.

Descriptions and reviews of Liszt’s playing, written by his contemporaries:

- Various collections: Ernst Burger\(^{13}\), Adrian Williams\(^{14}\)

Sound recordings of Liszt’s pupils, of particular interest here are the seven recordings of Rhapsody No.12 by the following pupils:

- Arthur Friedheim, Arthur de Greef, Alfred Reisenauer, Emil von Sauer, Alexander Siloti, Bernhard Stavenhagen, and Josef Weiss.\(^ {15}\)

**Literature Review**

There is an increasing body of literature surrounding Lisztian performance practice, but little with any specific focus on the Hungarian Rhapsodies.

Clive Brown’s 1999 monograph remains the most detailed technical manual on playing styles in nineteenth-century music, though it makes scarce reference to Liszt.\(^ {16}\)

Arne Jo Steinberg’s 1971 D.M.A. dissertation was an early study into the traditions of the Liszt school of piano-playing.\(^ {17}\) “What he concentrated on when he sat down to perform at the piano: what particular concepts he emphasized and considered vital and fundamental; and what the unique qualities of his approach were.”\(^ {18}\) It draws on various methods, writings, and articles by Liszt’s pupils and his teacher Carl Czerny; attempting to draw conclusions based on common trends found in the literature:

\(^{10}\) Lina Ramann, *Liszt-Pädagogium* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Hartel, 1986). Series III of the *Liszt-Pädagogium* is on the “Hungarian works,” with a short introduction and detailed notes and even metronome marks for Rhapsodies Nos.3 and 5. It is currently only published in German.


\(^{12}\) See Bibliography.


\(^{15}\) See Discography for details including labels and catalogue numbers.


\(^{17}\) Arne Jo Steinberg, “Franz Liszt’s Approach to Piano Playing” (D.M.A. diss., University of Maryland, 1971).

Although the students’ own ideas are often mingled with those of Liszt, one can nevertheless discern certain approaches which seem to be common to a great number of Liszt’s students and recognize that such approaches came from Liszt himself. To arrive at such recognition, however, entails the examination of a great deal of material in a variety of forms by a representative number of Liszt’s students. Although this pursuit seems to lead far afield when viewed at short range, it becomes revealing in the long run.19

Steinberg covers a broad range of topics: accentuation, dynamics, phrasing, rhythmic freedom, pedalling, technical approach (physiological and psychological), styles (mostly concerning music by composers other than Liszt), and special skills such as sight-reading and transposing at the keyboard. Little specific reference is made to the Rhapsodies.

In the Cambridge Companion to Liszt, Kenneth Hamilton dedicates an article to issues concerning the performance of Liszt’s piano music, discussing aesthetics, instruments, textual fidelity and alteration, pedalling, tempi, and technical aspects.20 He makes considerable reference to the Liszt–Pädagogium21 and the various diary notes of pupils, explaining these as “our main source of information on Liszt’s teaching.”22 Hamilton also discussed the same issues at greater length in his monograph After the Golden Age.23 Based on his study of the primary sources, he offers “a necessarily crude summary of some points that featured frequently in Liszt’s teaching:”

1. The music must flow in large phrases, not chopped up by over-accentuation...
2. The musical sense must continue through the frequent rhetorical pauses in Liszt’s music...
3. Expression should always avoid the sentimental...
4. Piano tone is usually to be imagined in orchestral terms...
5. Figuration in melodic sections of Liszt’s music should be frequently slow, not brilliant...
6. A certain flexibility of tempo is in order in most of Liszt’s music...
7. Liszt’s rubato was, according to Lachmund, “quite different from the Chopin hastening and tarrying rubato... more like a momentary halting of the time, by a slight pause here or there on some significant note, and when done rightly brings out the phrasing in a way that is declamatory and remarkably convincing... Liszt seemed unmindful of time, yet the aesthetic symmetry of rhythm did not seem disturbed.”24
8. Wrong notes...did not matter; inaccuracies were insignificant compared with musical insight.25

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19 Ibid, 45.
22 Ibid, 177.
Hamilton briefly touches on some of the textual alterations found on various recordings of Rhapsody No.2; suggesting that some such changes were as much a matter of simplifying the difficulty of certain passages, than for any artistic reason.26 Otherwise he makes little specific reference to the Rhapsodies.

The preface to the Hungarian Rhapsodies in the Neue Liszt Ausgabe makes reference to a popular general misunderstanding of the Rhapsodies.27

To this day these works are principally but erroneously looked upon as more or less trivial products of keyboard literature for the very reasons that they use folklore themes and employ them in the style of popular gipsy bands. We have here the reason for the general inaccuracy in performance and the tendency to indulge in vivid though rough showmanship. It is high time that Liszt’s Hungarian folklore studies were placed before interpreters in all their variety and their idiomatic richness. It should be pointed out that in performance, despite all the virtuosity they demand, mere technical bravura should never predominate. If the Hungarian Rhapsodies...have no programme that can be formulated in words, we must not overlook the poetic basis of both their content and their expression.28

The preface includes a discussion of the performance of these works, giving some detailed points relating to accentuation and rhythm. These points do not appear to have come from Liszt or any of his pupils, though some excerpts from the Liszt-Pädagogium are included as footnotes in the edition itself.

Ian Pace’s ‘Conventions, Genres, Practice in the Performance of Liszt’s Piano Music’ touches on various issues relating to Lisztian performance practice as a general field of interest; he includes a few detailed points based on sources such as the Liszt-Pädagogium.29 In the second part of the article, ‘Performing Liszt in the Style hongrois’,30 Pace focuses on the Hungarian Rhapsodies—beginning with a short history of Hungarian music and how Liszt fits into this context; before translating and contextualising the passages relating to the Hungarian Rhapsodies found in the Liszt-Pädagogium. Pace makes no mention of the possibility of studying recordings.

The study of early recordings is a burgeoning field of interest—it offers us a window into some of the performance practice traditions of the late nineteenth century. Artis Wodehouse’s 1977 D.M.A dissertation was an early exploration into studying nineteenth-century performance practice via early recordings.31 Wodehouse studied various Romantic-era piano treatises with theories relating to phrasing, accentuation, crescendo and diminuendo, tempo modification, and rubato. She then applied those theories to a particular Chopin nocturne (Op.15 No.2), notating various aspects;

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26 Ibid, 274-5.
28 Ibid, xiii.
comparing these findings with a considerable number of early recordings of the same Nocturne played by famous pianists born in the nineteenth century.

Since then, several more general studies have been made in this area. Robert Philip studied a wide range of recordings and written sources from the early twentieth century exploring various issues including tempo fluctuation, vibrato and portamento in piano, chamber, vocal, and orchestral music. He concludes with a discussion on the implications of his findings for students of nineteenth century music, posing thought-provoking questions about the contradictions found between written and recorded sources.

Neal Peres Da Costa conducted a similar survey of recordings, focusing exclusively on famous pianists born in the nineteenth century. He begins with an in-depth discussion of the problems which arise from the primitive early recording technology. He examines the following aspects: “dislocation of the hands”, unannotated arpeggiation, tempo modification, “metrical” rubato, and rhythmic alteration. He makes surprisingly little reference to Liszt or his pupils. Similar topics are also discussed in the Cambridge Companion to the Piano by Hamilton and Philip.

In Jonathan Bellman’s monograph The Style Hongrois in the Music of Western Europe, he suggests that the distinct performance style associated with Hungarian-Gypsy style might be recaptured by studying early sound recordings. Bellman has since written an article on early recordings of Brahms Hungarian Dances played by violinists associated with the composer, analysing trends in performance practice.

The general conclusion from the literature on early recordings is that there are aspects of performance which appear to have been common practice of musicians of the nineteenth century, but are not expressly written in notation—as Phillip pointed out, there often exists a gap between the theoretical writings of musicians, and what they actually play on their own recordings. It can be especially interesting in the case of composers playing their own works, and hearing how they

37 Robert Philip, “Pianists on Record in the Early Twentieth Century” in ibid, 75–95.
40 Philip, Early Recordings and Musical Style, 207–240. See also Robert Philip, Performing Music in the Age of Recording (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).
interpret their own notation, or rather, as Bilson put it, seeing “how they wrote it down.”41 Sadly Liszt died before the invention of sound recording, but he had many pupils, some of whom became famous pianists in their own right, whose careers extended into the recording era.

The lists of pupils collated by Walker is incredibly large.42 Some attended the Liszt’s Weimar masterclasses just once or twice; and not all pupils had private lessons—only the particularly gifted ones. Others, such as Arthur Friedheim, spent many years as a member of Liszt’s personal circle. It is an established truth that Liszt’s teaching, at least in the case of those gifted students, was characterised by trying to develop individuality and personality.43 Thus, it can be troublesome to distil Liszt’s own ideals from those of any single student. In his article in the Cambridge Companion to Liszt, Kenneth Hamilton, referring to the recordings of Liszt’s pupils as primary source material, acknowledges the problem of the individual tastes and styles of the pupils themselves:

Although all Liszt’s students had their own individuality, it is impossible to believe that, taken together, they cannot show the stylistic parameters within which his music should be played, and they certainly give us a good idea of how he actually heard it played towards the end of his life.44

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41 From his video lecture: Malcom Bilson, Knowing the Score (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2005 DVD).
Part A

Chapter 1: Background

In 1838, Hungary was devastated by a treacherous flood. Entire villages were swept away, crops destroyed and thousands were left homeless. Hearing of the tragedy Franz Liszt (1811-1886), who had left his native Hungary as a boy of ten to conquer the musical world, was suddenly roused with great feelings of patriotism. He wrote in May 1838:

I was badly shaken by that disaster.... And the surge of emotions revealed to me the meaning of the word homeland. I was suddenly transported back to the past, and in my heart I found the treasury of memories from my childhood intact. A magnificent landscape appeared before my eyes: it was the Danube flowing over the reefs! It was the broad plain where tame herds freely grazed! It was Hungary, the powerful, fertile land that has brought forth so many noble sons! It was my homeland. (....) O my wild and distant homeland, my unknown friends, my great family! Your painful cry calls me back to you, and deeply moved I bow my head, ashamed that I could forget you for such a long time. 45

Liszt, who had been staying in Venice at the time, rushed to Vienna to arrange a series of charity concerts in aid of the flood-relief cause. 46 It wasn’t until December of the following year, 1839, that Liszt finally returned to his homeland—it was his first return since leaving in 1823. His arrival was celebrated on a national scale, as the people cried “Éljen! Liszt Ferenc!” (“Hail! Franz Liszt!”). 47

It was during this trip that he was reunited with one of the passions of his youth – the wild and fantastic music of the Hungarian Gypsies. He described the experience of returning to Hungary and once again hearing this music:

We longed all the more to hear those rhythms and harmonies again on account of their appearing to us as emanating from another planet—they were so completely different from anything which European art permits, or even countenances, in any way, in music. But, however intolerable in the sight of European art, this was music. It was most unquestionably music; for it could speak, it could narrate, it could even sing. And how it sang! How sad were the accents which greeted us! They seemed like the voices of men in exile; like the pleading of the imprisoned bird; like the sigh of the orphaned soul; or the plaint of bereaved affection. We understood it well—this music; for it seemed to us like a native language. 48

Liszt was so taken by this music that he began to notate some of what he heard. The immediate result being the four volumes of Magyar dalok (Hungarian National Melodies) which were published by Haslinger in 1840. In 1846-7, six new volumes were published by Haslinger with the title Magyar

46 Ibid. 253–54
rapszódiák (Hungarian Rhapsodies⁴⁹). Between these ten volumes there are 22 numbered pieces, which were heavily revised to form the Hungarian Rhapsodies Nos.3–15, published in 1853.⁵⁰ The Hungarian Rhapsodies Nos. 1 and 2 had already been published in 1851 don’t appear to have been based on the earlier Magyar rapszódiák.⁵¹ The remaining few Rhapsodies, Nos.16-19 were written and published much later, during the 1880s.⁵²

The popularity of these works as concert repertoire has ensured that there has never been a shortage of editions.⁵³ There are several complete editions of the Rhapsodies.⁵⁴

- August Spanuth and John Orth, published by O. Diston (Boston, 1904)
- Eugen D’Albert, published by Schott (c.1906)
- Emil von Sauer, published by Peters (Leipzig, c.1913-17)
- Eduard Risler, Édition française de musique classique (Paris, 1917)
- Peter Raabe, Band 12 of Breitkopf & Härtel complete Liszt edition (1926)
- The modern scholarly edition is the Neue Liszt Ausgabe, Series I, vols 3 and 4; edited by Zoltán Gárdonyi and István Szélényi; published by Editio Musica Budapest (1972).

⁴⁹ The Hungarian spelling is usually kept for these early work in order to distinguish them from the later ones.
⁵² Several of the Rhapsodies exist in arrangements for different instruments: Nos. 2, 5, 6, 9, 12, and 14 for orchestra (arrangements by Doppler/Lisz); No.9 for piano trio (Lisz); No.12 for violin and piano (Joachim/Lisz); and No.14 for piano and orchestra as the Hungarian Fantasy (Lisz). An interesting aside is that some of the tunes from the Rhapsodies pop up in different places within these arrangements and Liszt’s other works: for instance the last section from Rhapsody No.8 comes at the end of the Symphonic poem Hungaria—and the tune from the coda of Rhapsody No.14 turns up at the end of the piano trio version of Rhapsody No.9.
⁵³ See the Critical notes to the Neue Liszt Ausgabe for a breakdown of the various first edition sources.
⁵⁴ Most of these editions have more or less the same text, with only minor variations. IMSLP finds a variety editions of individual Rhapsodies by the likes of Paderewski and von Bülow with much more liberal alterations and suggestions.
Chapter 2: The Style hongrois

Liszt wrote about how Gypsy music was so very far removed the principles of Western European music, and that how, as a child, he had longed to unravel the mystery of its charm:

> At that time we were merely the frail pupil of an austere master; and, as for our opinion of any artistic charm, it need only be said that the only outlet to the world of fantasy of which we had any idea was that of which a slight glimpse is obtained through the architectural scaffolding of notes, carefully adjusted according to learned principles. But that poor view only made us more curious to find out how it was that such attraction should be exercised by the hands; either passing rough bows over the strings of worthless instruments, or striking the brass with apparently thoughtless abruptness.\(^{55}\)

Jonathan Bellman made an attempt at codifying the various musical figures of what has become known as the Style hongrois—a musical vernacular based on certain tropes associated with Hungarian Gypsy music.\(^{56}\) According to Bellman, the Style hongrois came to symbolise the Gypsy stereotype as it existed in the popular mind of Western Europe in the nineteenth century:

> Apart from the musical attractiveness of the style hongrois, the extramusical associations made it even more effective for a composer to use...“Gypsy” meant endless wandering, societal contempt and abuse, freedom with all its positive and negative implications, and both metahuman despair and savage joy. The style hongrois suggested, therefore, extremes of emotion inaccessible to normal people, attainable only to the elemental tribe who lived in the wild and travelled with the wind and rain.\(^{57}\)

Some of his conclusions with regard to this symbolism seem rather far-fetched, though it does appear to echo some of Liszt’s own thoughts.\(^{58}\) The unusual style of Hungarian Gypsy music is made possible by the unique instrumentation of the typical Gypsy band—typically led by solo violin and cimbalom, with a variety of other instruments ad libitum:

> The foundation was always the violin and cimbalom... The whole group of instruments forming the Bohemian\(^{59}\) orchestra generally serves only to double the harmony, mark the rhythm, and form the accompaniment. They consist, for the most part, of flutes, clarinets, a little brass, a violoncello, a double-bass, and as many second violins as can be obtained.\(^{60}\)

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\(^{55}\) Liszt, *Gipsy in Music*, 130.


\(^{57}\) Ibid, 91-92.

\(^{58}\) Much of *Des Bohemians* is Liszt describing the Gypsy way of life in a similar vein.

\(^{59}\) In Evans’ translation, the term “Bohemian” is used interchangeably with “Gypsy.” While this has been said, it must be acknowledged that this group of people, today, prefer the name “Roma.” In the context of the present dissertation, the term “Gypsy” has been used purely for the reason that their music has been traditionally been associated with that name in English-speaking countries.

\(^{60}\) Liszt, *Gipsy in Music*, 312-313.
The first violin is the star of the ensemble—given the right to ornament the melody at will, deciding the tempo and leading the ensemble:

The first violin is everything in the Gipsy band; where the others only serve to darken his shadows and lighten his flight of gaiety. The violin by itself, of course, whatever might be the genius or technique of the artist, would never be able to produce the same effect as the combination; but none of the other musicians has any special part assigned to him.\(^{63}\)

The second in command is the cimbalom—Hungary’s national instrument, it is a kind of dulcimer with a similar range and construction to a square piano, and played with two light hammers.\(^{62}\)

Like the violin, the cimbalom lends itself to the ornamentations of little notes, trills and runs at every organ point.... The cimbalom supplies the rhythm, indicates the acceleration or slackening of time, as also the degree of movement. He manipulates with singular agility, and as if it were a slight-of-hand performance, the little wooden hammers with which he travels over the strings, and which in this primitive piano perform the duty we assign to ivory keys. The cimbalom shares with the first violin the right to develop certain passages and to prolong certain variations indefinitely according to the good pleasure of the moment.\(^{63}\)

Liszt writes of how the piano is well suited to imitating the colours and textures of the Gypsy band.\(^{64}\)

The piano...possesses certain features which might permit it to simulate the orchestra of the nomads; at all events less unfavourably than any other. It lends itself to the most luxuriant orchestration and is capable of delivering its rhythm simultaneously. It is also able to support the latter with a fair richness of harmony and a sufficiently massive sonority to give shadow where required and ensure the desired contrast between situations of opposite character. It can also in the meantime sing its melody with liberty; the more so as the intervals and the other features of Bohemian music lend themselves perfectly to its effects and give not the slightest trouble.\(^{65}\)

In the Rhapsodies, Liszt frequently imitates cimbalom textures (Example 1). It is worth noting that Liszt generally marks cimbalom effects to be played with pedal—the Cimbalom itself did not have a damper pedal until 1874, quite a few years after Liszt’s pieces were written, and he would have associated the Cimbalom with the glow of overtones it produced.\(^{66}\) This may suggest a liberal use of undamped effects in the Rhapsodies—but pianists would do well simply to observe the pedal marks where they are written by Liszt.

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\(^{61}\) Ibid, 303.


\(^{63}\) Liszt, *Gipsy in Music*, 312–313.

\(^{64}\) There are several fabulous recordings of Liszt’s Rhapsodies played by Gypsy bands: Rhapsody No.2 played by Sandor Lakatos and Ensemble, *Hungarian Gipsy Concert Music* (Hungaroton HCD 10288), track 17. Rhapsody No.2 also played by Roby Lakatos and his Ensemble, *Live From Budapest* (Deutsche Grammophon 459 642–2, 1999), track 13. Rhapsody No.14 played by Rajkó, *The Young Gipsy Band* (Qualiton HCD 10180–2), track 9.

\(^{65}\) Liszt, *Gipsy in Music*, 332.

We also see textures which resemble virtuosic violin-writing (Example 2 and 3). If the cimbalom textures carry implications of pedal effects, then the violin textures might well carry implications of a certain rhythmic freedom, perhaps independent from the accompaniment; considering what Liszt writes about the soloistic role of that player in the band who plays according to his wits and fancy.

Liszt evidently conceived the Rhapsodies in terms of these instrumental colours, and probably had these ideas in mind when he played them. Laura Kharer writes of Liszt’s playing of the Rhapsodies (1870):

I heard Liszt play daily, and often by the hour... What struck me most of all was the way in which Liszt seemed as it were to orchestrate with his fingers, a phenomenon most noticeable in his performances of his own works, above all the Rhapsodies, in which he displayed an amazing and unprecedented range of colour. His playing was at once poetry and revelation!

67 Quoted in Williams, Portrait of Liszt, 457.
Apart from their instrumentation and their unusual scales and harmonies, Liszt writes that the two elements which characterise Hungarian Gypsy performance are:

(1) “Their extremely flexible rhythms.”  

The succession, combination and enlargement of these rhythms render them marvellously apt to awaken poetical images in the mind—characteristic as they are either of fire, flexibility, dash, undulation, verve or fantastic caprice.... Nevertheless, these rhythms assume a gait which is not only free in itself but freely treated. There are no trepidations to be met with, no hesitations similar to those of the waltz or the mazurka. On the other hand, their diversity is infinite. Their rule is to have no rule.  

(2) “The ornamentation of the improvisor.”

It never happens that a Gipsy melody is delivered by one of their virtuosoi in its original simplicity; in a style, as we may describe it, of sober literalism; for the reason that, besides the passages which he inserts between each of the notes and at every organ-point, the endings of the periods under his bow naturally assume a character derived from *appoggiature* mordante or *gruppetti*, and are invariable marked (inverted mordent), (mordent) or X.

These are the essential elements of the style of playing which Liszt was trying to imitate in his Hungarian Rhapsodies—Liszt’s scores are incredibly detailed with marked tempo fluctuations; and ornamental passages are written with remarkable tact and finesse.

In his article on Brahms Hungarian Dance recordings, Bellman writes how the violinists associated with Brahms seem to exhibit an exaggerated freedom beyond anything written in the notation:

What can be understood as the ‘right’ way to play style hongrois compositions? *It is the flagrant contradiction of normative ‘classical’ performance style that the style hongrois is most convincingly played.* That is to say, when performers choose a sharply defined rhythm over smoothness, a noticeable (often brusque) agogic change that has to be accommodated over one that is conveniently subsumed under a comfortably proceeding pulse, a powerfully executed gesture over concern about perfect intonation, control and accuracy, they move beyond the realm of the Classic (in its widest sense) and into the realm of stylized rudeness and wildness, but also (for the listener) into the realm of that peculiar Gypsy musicianship that cannot be taught.

Should a similar attitude be taken with Liszt’s style hongrois works? Renowned Hungarian pianist Louis Kentner discussed the question of assimilating “authentic” Hungarian Gypsy performance practices in Liszt’s works, concluding that as Liszt himself was probably not aware of some of the subtleties of the Hungarian language and the original folk tunes he was adapting to form the Rhapsodies, players need not put too much emphasis on trying to study “authentic” performance.

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68 Liszt, *Gipsy in Music*, 300. These issues will be discussed further in Part B.

69 Ibid. 304-5.

70 Ibid. 300. These issues will be discussed further in Part B.

71 Ibid. 301. X appears in the Reeves edition, it presumably represents a turn.

72 Bellman, “Performing Brahms in the Style hongrois,” 340.
In his article on the Style hongrois, Ian Pace also touched on this question of assimilating “authentic” Hungarian style in the Rhapsodies:

In terms of considering how to perform the [Rhapsodies], what is most important is how Liszt’s ideas and methods were translated into specific compositions and the manner in which he desired them to be played. The question thus becomes not so much about what an ‘authentic’ approach to the music popularised by the [Gypsies] (and the manner of so doing) would be, as about how this style was envisaged in Liszt’s mind in so far as it was deemed appropriate for playing his pieces.

Kentner proposes a similar approach to Bellman while questioning the advocacy of an “analytical” approach to the interpretation of Liszt’s music—too much erudition may obscure the meaning of the Hungarian Rhapsodies:

A Busoni, the intellectual–virtuoso type of artist, could do justice to works like the B minor Sonata, the ‘Transcendental’ Studies or the ‘Norma’ Fantasy and many others of the kind; but judging by a few surviving recordings, even he failed in the Hungarian Rhapsodies. Here eloquence, red–hot intensity, go hand in hand with a looseness, a making–it–up–as–you–go–along style that perhaps only the Gypsies from Hungary (and probably Liszt himself) could so elegantly beguile our ears with, and which is within the powers of only very few living musicians. Fiery temperament, a deadly rhythmic urge, and above all, animal warmth—these things cannot be learned, one must be born with them.

Liszt would seem to agree with this sentiment—he writes that while one may be able to copy the outward effect of Hungarian Gypsy music, no amount of study could enable a Western musician to truly understand the style:

Even that musician who from childhood has been most familiar with their art—not only with its esoteric sense but also with its exoteric forms.... Even he who has become thoroughly initiated in the mysteries of Bohemian art can never be sufficiently master of Bohemian sentiment to formulate its expression as from his own heart and native inspiration.... The gift of virtuosity naturally contributes more than anything else to the reproduction of the soul of this race in a true and living manner. The artist who in imagination has assimilated Bohemian sentiment may borrow from their art the marvels of its colouring, the unexpected keys, the luxuriant ornamentation and the exotic intervals which stupefy our senses. He may go so far in copying its traits as finally to believe in a moment of enthusiasm that he can compare with—or even surpass them. What an illusion! ... He would never be, for a real Bohemian audience, the same as a virtuoso of their own race.

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74 Ibid, 204. For detail on these authentic traditions, see Bartok, Essays, 304-315, 361-302.
75 Pace, “Liszt and the Style hongrois,” 67-68.
76 Kentner, “Interpretation,” 204.
77 Liszt, Gipsy in Music, 227.
Chapter 3: Reception of the Hungarian Rhapsodies

The Hungarian Rhapsodies seem to have found immediate popularity following their publication in the early 1850s. Some small evidence of this is found in a letter dating from 1853: Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein reports that at a particular Dresden music shop, when she asked which of Liszt’s pieces sold best, the shopkeeper produced “the Rhapsodies, the Soirées de Vienne, and the Harmonies [poétiques et religieuses].” Leaping through Adrian Williams’ Portrait of Liszt shows that he was playing Hungarian works in public and private from as early as 1823, right up until his death in 1886.

The Rhapsodies may have been seen by the general public as a part of the tradition of “Hungarian style” Hausmusik—a genre of light, domestic music which was particularly popular in Vienna. Examples of this music include Hummel’s Ungarische Tänze, Op.23 (c.1807); Schubert’s Divertissement à la hongroise, Op.54 (1826); and later Brahms’ two books of Hungarian Dances (1869, 1880). The success of this genre had its roots in the popularity of gypsy bands, which were the mainstay of entertainment in cafés and restaurants in Austria and Hungary. But did the style have a deeper significance for Liszt, beyond light entertainment? He apparently thought that the general public would have trouble understanding and appreciating his Hungarian–style pieces, and intended to write an explanatory preface:

Fearing that this music, though so immensely popular in its own country [Hungary], might otherwise remain somewhat inaccessible to the habits both of mind and ear of other nations, we thought it might be well to cause our [work] to be accompanied by a few words of explanation sui generis; and, accordingly, we set about providing it with a preface.

Due to its length, the preface was not published with the Rhapsodies but eventually became an entire monograph, entitled Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie, first published in 1859. The book met with a great deal of criticism due to some controversial remarks in the area of “ownership” of Hungarian music, which led to an expanded and revised edition that was published in 1881.

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79 Williams, Portrait of Liszt, 9. The 11 year old Liszt played a version of the Rákóczy March in a concert in Pest, shortly before he left for Paris to study.
80 Ibid., 667. Liszt played Rhapsody No.13 in his last public appearance in London, 1886.
82 Liszt writes about how some of the musicians who played in these venues, who had become “commercial travellers”, were of a significantly lower standard than some of the famous names such as Bihari or Czermak. See Liszt, Gipsy in Music, 360–369.
Authorship of parts of the book also remain contested due to the collaborations Liszt made with Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, nevertheless the musical and autobiographical passages are generally agreed to have been penned by Liszt. In the first part of the book, Liszt establishes his view of the significance of Music for the Gypsy people—as these people lack their own highly developed written and spoken language, music is the language of their “national” poetry:

It was inevitable that burning aspirations, passionate dreams, remembrances impossible to disclose and disappointments beyond their power to explain, should appear in flaming vision and traverse the soul of such a people. But, should the day arrive when it might desire to sing to itself its own poetry, it would have to seek for that purpose some other medium than articulate speech.  

It was instrumental music that emerged to fill this need:

It must be observed that, amongst all the arts, instrumental music is precisely that which expresses sentiment without proceeding to any direct application of it. It does not attempt to clothe the feeling it expresses with any allegory of facts, as narrated by the poem; nor does it seek to illustrate it by conflicts, as represented on the theatre stage, by actual persons of the drama and their action. It brightens and charms the passions in their very essence, without endeavouring to represent them by real or imaginary personifications.

Liszt postulates that this musical poetry, taken in its entirety, represents the Gypsy National Epic; each particular piece being but one canto or fragment of a larger complete work:

This is a race which must, after all, retain somewhere within its heart a trace of noble quality; since, being capable of idealisation, it has idealised itself; and is in possession of poems and cantos capable of forming, when united, the national Epopeia of the Bohemians. We say “Epopeia,” although their poems and songs contain no recital, refer to no event, and recall no souvenir. What they really do is to repeat sentiments applying to all individuals of the same race—sentiments which go to form their interior type, the physiognomy of their soul, the expression of their entire sentient being.

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89 Ibid., 10.
It was with this idea in mind that Liszt penned his Hungarian Rhapsodies:

Profoundly moved as since childhood we have always been by Bohemian music—being even then already familiar with its incomparable attractions and initiated in the secret of its life-giving sentiment; besides gradually penetrating the sense of its form and the need for protecting its eccentricities in order to preserve its character and personality, it was natural that we should have been very early induced to transfer some of its pieces to the piano... After having submitted a fair number of these pieces to the process of transcription, it began to dawn upon us that we should never finish... The more we advanced the more we had still to do, and finally we could perceive no limit to it at all. A mountain of material was before us; we had to compare, select, eliminate and elucidate. By dint of these occupations we acquired the conviction that in reality these detached pieces were parts of one great whole. Parts disseminated, scattered and broken up; but lending themselves perfectly to construction of one harmonious ensemble. The task was therefore to collect these into one homogeneous body. Though forming a complete work, it might be divided in such a way as to allow each “canto” to be self-sufficient, as well as forming part of the grand total. It might be made susceptible to being separated from the rest; enjoyed apart and quite independently of the rest; whilst, all the while, remaining one with the rest by identity of style, analogy of inspiration, and unity of form.... We believe that, thus consolidated, it results in [a work] fairly corresponding to what we have ventured to consider a Bohemian Epic. 90

In this context, the meaning of the title “Hungarian Rhapsodies” become clear, insofar as one defines Rhapsody as “an epic poem of a suitable length for recitation at one time.” 91

By the word “Rhapsody” the intention has been to designate the fantastically epic element which we deem this music to contain. Each one of these productions has always seemed to us to form part of a poetical cycle, remarkable by the unity of its inspiration, eminently national. 92

As Liszt himself acknowledged, the Hungarian Rhapsodies did not fail to find “success.” 93 Rhapsody No.2 proved particularly popular, so much so that by the 1880s it was considered hackneyed, and Liszt famously wouldn’t hear it in his Weimar masterclasses. 94

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90 Ibid., 333–34.
92 Liszt, The Gipsy in Music, 337. Liszt also discusses the reasoning behind them being “Hungarian” rather than “Gypsy” Rhapsodies: “The qualification “Hungarian” which we have applied to these Rhapsodies is due to our feeling that it would not have been just to separate in the future what has never been separated in the past. It was the Magyars [Hungarians] who adopted the Bohemians as national musicians; it was they who identified themselves as much with their proudly fierce enthusiasms as with the poignant sorrows they know so well how to express.”
93 Ibid, 336.
Into the Twentieth Century, most concert pianists would keep at least one or two rhapsodies in their repertoire. As the century progressed, Liszt’s “second rhapsody” was cemented in the popular imagination by the famous Tom and Jerry (“Cat Concerto”, 1945) and Bugs Bunny (“Rhapsody Rabbit”, 1945) cartoons. Despite the popularity of the Rhapsodies, opinions tend to be divided as to their musical worth and value as compositions—they have often been dismissed as shallow or superficial showpieces, in the same category as his early operatic fantasies. Liszt’s pupil Arthur Friedheim writes:

The fact has been proved that Liszt’s great operatic fantasies, while creating a furore, at the same time had the undesirable effect of discrediting him as a composer. The verdict in Paris was, “he cannot compose, for he who builds on the ideas of others must be devoid of ideas of his own.” Such was the judgment of the vox populi, not necessarily vox dei, as most frequently the former is not inspired by the justice of heaven, but by the injustice of the world. Liszt was triumphant everywhere at the piano, but as soon as he ceased playing the old prejudice reawakened. However, in time a kind of apathetic indifference manifested itself, the operatic fantasies passed into oblivion, and whatever survived of them was accepted unconcernedly. The rhapsodies remained, and continued to act on his reputation like undermining influence, like a cankerous [sic] disease, or like a “curse of the wicked deed” in Schiller’s “Bride of Messina,” that perpetuates the wicked spirit.

James Huneker (1911) put his opinion rather bluntly:

I am sure when the empty operatic paraphrases and rhapsodies are forgotten the true Liszt will shine brighter. How tinkling are the Hungarian rhapsodies—now become café entertainment. And how the old bones do rattle. We smile at the generation that could adore The Battle of Prague, the Herz Variations, the Kalkbrenner Fantasias, but the next generation will wonder at us for having so long tolerated this drunken gypsy, who dances to fiddle and cymbalom accompaniment. He is too loud for polite nerves. Technically, the Liszt arrangements are brilliant and effective for dinner music. One may show off with them, make much noise and a reputation for virtuosity, that would be quickly shattered if a Bach fugue were selected as a text. One Chopin Mazurka contains more music than all of the rhapsodies, which I firmly contend are but overadressed pretenders to Magyar blood. Liszt’s pompous introductions, spin-out scales, and transcendental technical feats are not precisely in key with the native wood-note wild of genuine Hungarian folk-music. A visit to Hungary will prove this statement. Gustav Mahler was right in affirming that too much gipsy has blurred the outlines of real Magyar music.

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95 Proven simply by the sheer quantity of recordings from the early Twentieth Century - see Discography.
98 James Huneker, Franz Liszt (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1911), 65. Huneker may be confusing Magyar and Gypsy music.
By contrast, in the preface to his edition of the Rhapsodies, Liszt’s pupil Eugen d’Albert waxed lyrical about the charming personality of Liszt’s Hungarian-style works:

On looking through a good book which we have not seen for years, we experience a similar pleasure as when suddenly meeting a dear old friend, whom we have not seen for a long while. This, I suppose, is the best test of the inherent worth of a book. Such a feeling of delight the Hungarian Rhapsodies by Liszt awakened in me, I had not set eyes on them for many a year although I had a good deal of them in my fingers. What abundance of spirit, what magic richness of imagination does not dwell in these works! The primordial, weird strains of the Magyars of wild descent, could not have found a more intense nor a more brilliant exponent of their characteristics than Franz Liszt. Born and bred a true Hungarian, he above anyone else understood how to weld these lays into an interesting and artistic whole, preserving in an inimitable manner so enchanting as to provide a lasting artistic treat of the highest order to all music-lovers.  

In a review of a recital by Arthur Friedheim (1912), Hermann Finck writes how Liszt’s pupil revealed a deep poetry in Rhapsody No.2:

After the concert, he added several encores, among them...Liszt’s thrilling 2nd Rhapsody. Mr. Friedheim understands full well that the Liszt Rhapsodies were never intended as mere showpieces, and he does not play them as such. By treating them in the deeply poetic and emotional spirit in which they were conceived, he reveals them in their true light. Hackneyed as the second Rhapsody may be, it aroused the most spontaneous applause of anything on the entire programme yesterday. It must be remembered that what seems hackneyed to professionals, does not seem so to the public, which never tires of works of genius like the Liszt Rhapsodies.

Huneker reviewed the same concert, and writes glowingly about the revelation he found in Friedheim’s playing of Liszt, though he does not mention the rhapsody specifically. Comparing these two passages would seem to imply that the difference between critical sympathy and spite lies in the delivery of the work, as Henry T. Finck wrote in his book *Success in Music And How It Is Won*:

What are the pieces with which a concert pianist at the present time is surest to delight an audience, provided he plays them well? Having been for twenty-eight years a newspaper critic in a city where all the great players are heard, I can answer that question accurately: the Etudes of Chopin and Liszt’s Hungarian rhapsodies... But they must be played as Liszt played them, as the gypsies played the melodies and the ornaments he borrowed from them. No pianist, no matter how clever he may be, can render this music in the proper spirit unless he has read Liszt’s book on The Gypsies and Their Music. That book will give him a thousand ideas; it will fan the enthusiasm without which the most astounding technic is dull; it will teach him that the true art of playing is improvisation, the unfettered, irregular art of the gypsy, to whom technic is not an end in itself but a means to an end—the expression of his melancholy or fiery feelings.

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101 Ibid, 315-17.
Charles Rosen, in *The Romantic Generation* (1995), expresses a similar sentiment about the impact of delivery in revealing the essence of these works:

The least respectable side of Liszt is to be found in the Hungarian Rhapsodies; even more than the opera fantasies, this is what has given him a bad reputation, and it is from the fame of these works that his most earnest admirers feel that he must be rescued. Let us choose a passage from the central part of the tenth Rhapsody in which one cannot speak of thematic mastery or of daring harmonic innovation. The harmonies are banal, the melodies almost nonexistent…. It is the zero degree of musical invention if we insist that invention must consist of melody, rhythm, harmony, and counterpoint. Nevertheless, *played with a certain elegance*, these pages are both dazzling and enchanting.\(^{103}\) [my emphasis]

Friedheim wrote that players who fail to overcome the technical difficulties of the Rhapsodies turn them from something light and sparkling, into something heavy, boldly fragrant, and only to be taken in moderation:

Even those Liszt pupils who enjoyed his personal ministrations were not always successful [in interpreting Liszt’s works]. One had to understand the man, to be in perfect communion with the spiritual beauty and sublimity of his nature, to profit by what he taught. There are not too many in this world capable of responding to those transcendental qualities, and so much of what the Master sought to impart was lost.

His Hungarian Rhapsodies are not correctly delivered today because players have not caught the *correct stimmung*. They do not subordinate the technical aspects of the music sufficiently. They do not seem to realize that Liszt conceived of these pieces as a series of paintings.\(^{104}\) They fail with his operatic transcriptions for the same reason and because they overlook all but the technic. In the hands of innumerable pianists the ‘Don Juan Fantasy’ is no longer like champagne but whisky.\(^{105}\)

In *Des Bohémiens*, Liszt manifests his view of the philosophy of Virtuosity:

The virtuoso is not a mason; who, taking blocks of stone and with square, level and trowel in hand, (a conscientious and exact proceeding), constructs the poem which the architect has already designed upon paper. He is not a passive instrument, reproducing the thoughts and feelings of others, whilst adding nothing of his own. He is not a reader, more or less expert, delivering a text; without marginal notes or glossary, and requiring no interlinear commentary.


\(^{104}\) As quoted above, Liszt conceived of the Rhapsodies as a series of poems, not paintings; though the sentiment remains the same.

\(^{105}\) Quoted in Friedheim, *Life and Liszt*, 16.

He goes on to compare the rôle of the virtuoso to that of the dramatic artist—the actor who creates his character. Such an artist is not only essential to establishing the popular image of a particular character in the public imagination, but whatever genius may be written by a playwright is at the mercy of his actors. Liszt assumed that the virtuoso should realise the same burden:

Now the virtuoso or musical artist does for music exactly what the actor or dramatic artist does for the stage; or, in other words, for the poem, whether tragic or comic, of an author. The virtuoso possesses the same right of life and death over the works the interpretation of which is entrusted to him with their thoughts, sentiments and emotions; for the expression of all these, being part of interpretation, is for the glorious moment committed to his care. He can endow them with a glorious life, similar to that enjoyed by the heroes in Elysian fields; or he can allow them, or even cause them, to die a death equally ignominious and ridiculous.107

By this logic, it would stand to reason that any work, performed without ease and conviction will stand little chance of being understood or appreciated. Liszt writes how music notation fails to convey the energy and passion of the Gypsy performers, especially when transcribed in a style of “sober literalism”108 (to use his own phrase):

When we examine the dead-letter of these improvisations (which in our country are to be met with at every step, or perhaps we should say at every music-shop) we find many a Lassan or Frischka, originally taken from a [piece of Gypsy music], which has not only lost its name, but could never convey to any reader the least idea of the brio of execution of the Bohemian virtuoso, the incessant mutations of their rhythms, the burning eloquence of their phrasing, or the expressive accent of their declamation.109

In these works, which evoke a style of music that Liszt himself describes as “so completely different from anything which European art permits”110, can we trust the notation to tell us everything? It is generally understood that certain characteristics of certain styles cannot be reflected in notation, such as the hesitating rhythm of the waltz or the mazurka. In Des Bohémiens, Liszt writes of the characteristic freedom that has long been associated with the music of the Hungarian Gypsies, the Rhapsodies themselves show Liszt’s fondness for the liberties and excesses of that music—and presumably players of the Rhapsodies must try and incorporate some impression of that style if they are to give a fair representation of the composer’s intention. It is here that the study of recordings becomes necessary, for they capture a multitude of subtleties which may be expected but which cannot be notated.

108 He is perhaps referring to the kind of publication which merely notates “popular airs” with nothing but a simplistic harmonisation. Liszt’s own early transcriptions of the Magyar dallok could well be an example—he must have realised the futility of this approach for communicating the Gypsy style; which led him to approach the transcriptions in the manner he adopted in the Magyar rapszodiak and the Hungarian Rhapsodies.
109 Liszt, The Gipsy in Music, 325
110 Ibid., 131.
Part B

Chapter 2: The Liszt-Pupil Recordings of Rhapsody No.12

Building upon the methodology adopted by the above Wodehouse, Philip, and Peres da Costa; the present study was undertaken using the following protocols:¹¹

- A system of notation is adopted which marks the location and relative intensity of tempo fluctuations: speeding up and slowing down, as well as pauses, “breaths”, and other rhythmic alterations.

- Minor textual alterations are written out as they appear in the recordings in regular notation. More complex additions such as cadenzas and flourishes are described in words as their manner is usually improvisational, and for the purposes of this study, notating them would be impractical or in some cases impossible.

Due to the relatively primitive technology, sometimes detail in the recordings is not the best. The piano roll recordings, for instance, can only capture notes and rhythm with any kind of accuracy, with dynamics only provisional and, apparently, in some cases added later by an editor.¹² In some cases the quality of the recording makes it extremely difficult to transcribe exactly what notes are being added or subtracted, in such cases a worded description is also given as to the kind of alteration made.

This method of analysis has practical value for pianists—who can sit at the piano and play the piece with the rubatos and alterations of Friedheim or von Sauer. The following discussion attempts to describe some of the interesting points about each recording; to give a more subjective view of the effect that their playing produces.

Metronome marks have not been recorded as, for the vast majority of the performances, the frequent tempo fluctuations make metronomisation difficult if not entirely meaningless. As d’Albert put it, in the preface to his edition of the Rhapsodies:

Metronome-marks I have naturally abstained from putting, as much in pieces like these wild children of the Puszta, which are always moving in rhapsodic rubato–rhythms, such directions would be sheer folly.¹³

In producing this analysis it must be acknowledged some of the changes made by the pianists could be the result of the edition they played from; but it is impossible to know with any certainty which

¹¹ See Appendix for Notation Key and Side–by–Side Analyses
¹² For a lengthy discussion on this, see Peres da Costa, Off the Record, 3–40.
¹³ D’Albert, preface.
edition any of the pianists were looking at. The choice was made to conduct this analysis with reference to the Peters Edition edited by Emil von Sauer (Leipzig, c.1913–17). While this decision is somewhat arbitrary, it was chosen based on the following reasoning:

- It is anachronistic to use the *Neue Liszt Ausgabe*, while it may well be scholarly and “correct,” it was published long after these pianists died.
- It likewise seems improbable that any of these pianists had access to a first edition given it was published before any of them were born.
- While the Peters Edition was published after several of these recordings were made; it was edited by von Sauer, whose recording is among those we are studying, so it is possible that he, if nobody else, was playing from this edition.

**Arthur Friedheim (1859-1932)**

Arthur Friedheim first went to Liszt in 1880, and spent the next several years, until Liszt’s death in 1886, as one of his most faithful students, becoming a close friend and even acted as Liszt’s personal secretary for some time. C. F. Weitzmann wrote that Friedheim “in regard to brilliancy and precision of technique has few rivals. He is in the main a *Liszt* player, and with reference to the latter’s work is a reliable maintainer of the direct tradition.” Apart from No.12, Friedheim also recorded Rhapsodies Nos.2, 6, 9 and 10 on various piano rolls; as well as No.2 (abridged) and No.6 on disc. Friedheim writes about playing Rhapsody No.12 in a concert at which Liszt was present—and could very well have had lessons on the piece. Friedheim wrote a lengthy article on the Rhapsodies, hypothesising that their poor critical reception is the result of the unjust treatment they receive from virtuoso pianists who play them tastelessly.

Friedheim’s recording was made on Welte piano roll in 1905. His recording is characterised by a particularly delicate sensitivity of rhythm, with an approach that feels almost reverent when compared with some more modern recordings. He makes very considered use of tempo fluctuation—occasionally extreme, but never over-the-top or obnoxious; it is always with an extremely acute sense of musical character. He creates a distinct separation of mood between the different sections, but always structures the phrasing in such a way that the coming of a new section seems perfectly natural and reasoned. He makes an interesting alteration by cutting the first few

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114 In some cases it seems likely that these pianists (particularly Friedheim and von Sauer) learnt the piece in their student days and had been playing it in public for years; and might well not have looked at a score in just as long—this may account for some of the small modifications of the phrases, which seem to be without any particular purpose.
115 Downloaded from IMSLP.
notes of the cadenza passage in Bar 13, which helps keep the intensity of the drama moving forward, and which is characteristic of his sense of rhetoric.

He makes a particularly beautiful effect in the *Un poco più lento* (Example 4): giving the sense of an almost imperceptible pause on each of the main beats in Bars 21–22, and similarly in Bars 26–27, giving the ornaments with an utmost delicacy and freedom—playing them quickly and softly, the grace notes before the beat. He contrasts this by playing the cadential figure in Bars 29–30 short, detached and in time.

(Example 4, Bars 21–30)

The section marked *sempre rubato* (Example 5) is taken with an extreme flexibility of tempo which would certainly be described as vulgar by modern tastes; with a violent push and pull in each two-bar phrase. It is, of course, extremely effective.

(Example 5, Bars 88–103)
He makes a larger alteration of the double thirds section—playing it the first time down the octave (Bars 153-160), and the second time up the octave (Bars 170-177), the reverse of what is written; compensating by adding and subtracting from the lead-in chromatic scales. He repeats the first bar of the Stretto Vivace, as if the soloist enters "when the mood takes him." Strangely, he omits half of Bar 190, perhaps in error. The right hand in Bar 249 is played two octaves higher, in the top register of the piano.

Arthur de Greef (1862-1940)

Arthur de Greef studied with Liszt c.1879-1881. His name is particularly associated with Grieg, whose piano concerto he was the first to record in full.\textsuperscript{122} His recording of Liszt’s Hungarian Fantasy (1923), conducted by Landon Ronald, is fantastically evocative, with a genuinely remarkable use pedalling and tone colour. He made two disc recordings of Rhapsody No.12, one acoustic in 1922, and an one electric circa 1925-6. It is interesting to note that the cuts and alterations are identical on both recordings; hence it seems redundant to analyse both—this analysis was done on the earlier recording. His playing is full of drama and panache, and he is quite fond of unnotated arpeggiation. The opening four bars set up an air of utmost seriousness—he gives the tremolos in Bars 2 and 4 their full length, with a tremendous crescendo. He makes a remarkable effect playing the Un poco più lento (Example 6) with a finely balanced pianissimo. He plays the ornaments with extreme delicacy, taking extra time over the first few notes of the written-out turns, and playing the grace notes on the beat with a slight emphasis. He alters bar 27, playing the inner right hand chords later than written, so that they are arpeggiated after the left hand chords, adding an inner voice with the suspended A which resolves to G-sharp a beat later. The rhythmic inflection of the ornamental figure in this bar is exquisitely executed, giving a feeling of freely independent parts.

(Example 6, Bars 21-30)

\textsuperscript{121} Hamilton suggested this kind of extension of accompaniment figure as a common element in Lisztian practice in a lecture available on YouTube: Kenneth Hamilton, \textit{Professor Kenneth Hamilton discusses Liszt's Legacy to his Students} (9 October 2012). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaU-T8ZAHkc

\textsuperscript{122} Carter, \textit{Rediscovering the Liszt Tradition}, 196.
De Creef makes the largest amount of cuts, which could be due to time limitations of the discs. He swaps the Bars 31–34 with the varied version of the same material from Bars 104–109. He plays the Allegro zingarese section, repeating a few bars at the end of the section (Bars 73–76) and, skipping the cadence, he cuts from Bar 77 to Bar 127; modulating by way of an added trill (G and A-flat) which steps up to meet the trill in Bar 128 (A-flat and B-flat). The dolce grazioso tune (Example 7) is played with a wonderful brio, with a snap to the grace notes. Every inner chord is arpeggiated until Bar 148. Like most of the recordings, he slows down in Bar 142, perhaps so it matches with the rit in Bar 150.

(Example 7, Bars 135–153)

The Stretto Vivace is played with a fabulous sense of rhythm, and is very strongly accented. Like Friedheim, he repeats the first bar of this section, and he doubles the bass notes at the lower octave and fifth for the first 8 bars of the section.
Alfred Reisenauer (1863-1907)

Alfred Reisenauer studied with Liszt from the age of twelve, in 1876, until Liszt’s death in 1886. The two Welte rolls by Reisenauer (Rhapsody No.10 and Chopin/Lisz The Maiden’s Wish) are subtitled “as played by Reisenauer according to personal recollections of Liszt.” His recording of Rhapsody No.12 was made on Triphonola roll c.1905. Grieg commented in his diary in 1906 that hearing this roll “was really like listening to Reisenauer himself.”

Reisenauer’s recording of Rhapsody No.12 is perhaps the least remarkable among the Liszt pupils. His playing is very precise and his sense of rhythm is characterful and stylish, but lacks the sense of caprice found in the recordings of some of his colleagues. He felt no reason to alter Liszt’s text in any substantial way—his only alterations are to delete a few of the grace notes from the Un poco più lento section, but he makes up for it by adding some extra ones to the Sempre rubato section. He also has a taste for adding extra rolls to the arpeggio flourishes in Bars 114, 136 and 169. He clearly remembered Liszt’s timeless aphorism: “I am fond of long trills;” as he holds on to the trill in Bar 52 for longer than any of the other recordings. But once again he makes up for it by stopping the trill which starts in Bar 161, four bars early.

Emil von Sauer (1862-1942)

Emil von Sauer studied with Nikolai Rubinstein in Moscow before he went to Liszt in 1884; when he wrote about playing Rhapsody No.12 for Liszt:

At the little private matinée…. I played… Liszt’s Twelfth Rhapsody. Although because of continual travelling around I was not in practice, and my performances revealed more technical defects than I would have wished on such an important occasion, the Master was tolerant enough to show warm appreciation, especially in his Rhapsody. From time to time he called out such encouraging words as ‘bravo’, ‘bravissimo’, ‘pretty…’, ‘hm’, ‘very pretty…’, ‘hm!’ When I had come to the end he confirmed his pleasure with a kiss on the forehead, and also seemed delighted to grant my request to enrol me among his pupils for the summer.

Sauer’s disc recording was made on the Spanish Regals label circa 1923. His recording is characterised by a grand boldness of gesture and tightness of rhythm, contrasted with an extremely delicate lightness. In some ways, his recording is similar to Friedheim’s, in his ability to structure the phrases with an ear for their rhetorical meaning. He differs from Friedheim in that he makes far more cuts, probably due to time restraints of the disc. In the Un poco più lento (Example 8), von Sauer

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123 Carter, Rediscovering the Liszt Tradition, 202.
125 Peres da Costa, Off the Record, 25.
126 Göllnerich, Diary Notes from Liszt’s Masterclasses, 161.
127 Friedheim was also present at this meeting.
128 Quoted in Williams, Portrait of Liszt, 631.
adopts the same pausing effect as Friedheim, but manages to make the ornaments more like recitative than melody. He makes a bolder use of dynamics in this section than any of his colleagues. He also noticeably straightens up the tempo for the cadential figure in Bars 29-30, in the same manner as Friedheim.

(Example 8, Bars 21-30)

Sauer creates a most breathtaking effect in Bars 82-87 (Example 9); he builds up the resonance with the dampers raised and then makes a dramatic decrescendo and stops playing—allowing the piano to ring out with a wonderful colour.

(Example 9, Bars 82-87)
Alexander Siloti (1863-1945)

Alexander Siloti studied with Liszt in Weimar from 1883 until 1886. In his memoir about his time with Liszt, Siloti recounts an anecdote about Liszt giving him permission to make alterations to his works wherever he felt them necessary:

I once brought the 14th Rhapsody to play to him, telling him beforehand that I had dared to make some alterations in it, and even to omit certain passages, and that I had wanted his opinion on it. After I had played it he said: "I not only acquiesce in, but thoroughly approve of what you have done, in proof whereof I give you my permission to make any alterations and omissions you wish—and this at any time, even after I am gone; for I know that what you consider necessary will not be detrimental to the music—indeed you may say in such cases that it is as I wished it. You have my sanction in advance to anything you may do in my name; only," he added with a smile, "please don’t sign my cheques.”

Siloti made his recording of Rhapsody No.12 on Duo–Art piano roll in March 1923. There also exists a fragment of the Rhapsody (the first 20 bars) recorded privately on disc.

Siloti’s recording of Rhapsody No.12 is what might be described as playing “in the grand manner”—that common characteristic of pianists of the era, which Liszt-pupil Moriz Rosenthal described:

The grand manner is—very simply—a grand manner. A manner of playing which forms itself upon grand concepts, makes such concepts personal by grand enthusiasms, and paints its pianistic picture in bold, brilliant, grand strokes.

This is an apt characterisation of Siloti’s playing. Every gesture is exaggerated to the utmost. His playing is frequently fast and energetic, as he “pushes through” every phrase, but it never feels rushed. He gives the effect of tempo rubato in several passages, such as Bar 26, where the left hand appears to stall while the right hand moves ahead. He demonstrates mastery of this effect in the Sempre rubato section (Example 10). It is a completely different extreme to that found in Friedheim’s recording, but it is no less convincing. He dots the rhythm—elongating the first note of each two-note slur; and plays the left hand arpeggios in a free manner, completely unconcerned with with the right hand.

129 Carter, Rediscovering the Liszt Tradition, 205.
130 Siloti, My Memories of Liszt, 359.
131 Duo–Art piano roll no.6585. Carter, Rediscovering the Liszt Tradition, 85.
132 Quote in Hamilton, After the Golden Age, 5.
The *Quasi marcia* is played with an unusual lilt and accent—such that it almost resembles some kind of South American dance. It is a kind of playing which completely defies notation, so subtle is its characterisation. It is a completely different interpretation to the usual over-dotted majestic march, heard in every other recording. The drive to the end of the piece is perhaps the most exciting and effective among these recordings, with a continual pushing of the tempo, such that by Bars 231–240, the right hand figuration is easier when played in double notes rather than the alternating thirds written by Liszt.

**Bernhard Stavenhagen (1862-1914)**

Bernard Stavenhagen studied with Liszt from 1885 until Liszt's death in 1886. Like Reisenauer’s two recordings on Welte–Mignon, Stavenhagen’s roll is subtitled as played “according to personal recollections of Liszt’s playing.” Stavenhagen’s roll is notable in its extreme deviation from the score—to the point where hardly a bar goes by as written. Particularly fascinating given the subtitle—one wonders if the deviations are more or less based on how Liszt played it on one particular occasion, or if this is just a rough impression of Liszt’s general manner of playing. It would be worthwhile to transcribe Stavenhagen’s roll in its entirety, but given the complex nature of Stavenhagen’s additions, and without access to a copy of the roll itself, such a task is beyond the
scope of this project. By the same token, due to the extensiveness of some of his alterations, the
method of analysis that was perfectly suitable for the other recordings is not viable for Stavenhagen’s
roll.

Stavenhagen’s playing is somewhat in the same vein as Siloti; it is something of the “grand
manner,” with bold, exaggerated gestures. His alterations start in the Bar 2, where he adds a long
chromatic run, up and down, in the right hand, which is also replicated in Bar 4. In Bar 11, he fills out
the chord with added bass notes, before introducing an ascending cadenza passage in alternating
seconds that leads to a trill that unfolds into Liszt’s dotted figure, now in thirds. The descending
passage in Bars 12–13 is played with great speed, leading to a truncated version of Liszt’s cadenza. The
chordal passage in Bars 14–15 is played incredibly fast, but without the dotted rhythm, leading to an
added arpeggio flourish up and down the piano. Bars 17–20 are played with added bass notes.
Stavenhagen reads the rolled chord in Bars 21 as two separate block chords, and plays the remainder
of the section in the same manner, with utmost freedom of tempo. The next major alteration is the
cut of Bars 67–80. The Sempre rubato section is played with incredible elasticity of tempo, with many
added grace notes and other ornaments, adding an arpeggio flourish at the end. The following section
is played with incredible speed and dash. The Dolce grazioso is played with even greater panache
and flexibility—with a variety of notes and ornaments added. The double thirds section at Bar 154 is
played at an unbelievably fast tempo; and the cadenzas that follow it are considerably altered. In the
Stretto Vivoce, he repeats the first bar of accompaniment and plays the right hand melody an octave
lower in each successive phrase, reaching over the left hand for the third time. He then invents a
seemingly random passage of chords, loosely based on the figuration and harmony of what is
written, before emerging at Bar 207 as if nothing happened. A similarly improvised passage cuts to
the cimbalom effect at Bar 254, which passes by like a flash as he arrives at the coda. He adds
expansive octave scales in the left hand from Bar 273, which is shortly interrupted by a glissando over
the entire length of the piano. The last few bars are replaced with an extended chordal passage.
Josef Weiss (1864-1919)

Josef Weiss was born in Hungary, and started studying with Liszt in 1876 at the age of twelve. Apart from his disc recording of Rhapsody No.12 (1918), he also recorded Brahms’ Hungarian Dance No.7. His playing is incredibly stylish and sensitive, particularly in terms accentuation and phrasing. He makes little by way of textual alteration, apart from cutting a few repeated phrases, probably due to time-constraints. In Bars 1 and 3 of the Rhapsody (Example 11), he makes an unusual arpeggiation of the grace notes.

(Example 11, Bar 1)
He also gives the descending figure in Bars 12–13 (Example 12) a rather piquant lilt.

(Example 12, Bars 12–13)
He creates a stirring effect by deleting one bar (65) at the climax of a phrase in the Allegro zingarese (Example 13), replacing it with an almost imperceptible breath–pause.

(Example 13, Bars 61–65)

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133 Carter, Rediscovering the Liszt Tradition, 208.
Chapter 5: Textual Fidelity

Liszt identifies the luxuriant use of ornamentation to be one of the vital characteristics of Hungarian Gypsy music:

It never happens that a Gipsy melody is delivered by one of their virtuosi in its original simplicity; in a style, as we may describe it, of sober literalism; for the reason that, besides the passages which he inserts between each of the notes and at every organ-point, the endings of the periods under his bow naturally assume a character derived from appoggiature mordante or grupetti, and are invariable marked (inverted mordent), (mordent) or X.  

These decorative passages usually arise from improvisation:

The extent of its expression depends entirely upon the inspiration of the moment; which also decides the precise form to be given to the cloud of notes. These roll forth in figure after figure, reminiscent of the entangled tendrils.  

The Hungarian Rhapsodies are laden with with ornamental passages of every kind; but did he expect players to add their own passages or alter the text in other ways?  

As much of Liszt’s art has its roots in improvisation, there is a notion of a certain amount of textual freedom in his music. There are many instances of Liszt writing out cadenzas and amendments of particular pieces, for his students. F. W. Riesberg relays an anecdote: having asked Liszt about altering a particular passage to make it easier to play, Liszt answered: “I merely wrote the notes—play them the easiest way.” Liszt’s fondness for extemporising alterations and cadenzas has been frequently recounted. Writing of an occasion on which Liszt played a Rhapsody, Amy Fay gives an impression of the ease with which Liszt extemporised passagework:

He never did the same thing twice alike. If it were a scale the first time, he would make it in double or broken thirds the second, and so on, constantly surprising you with some new turn. And while you were admiring the long roll of the wave, a sudden spray would be dashed over you, and make you catch your breath! No, never was there such a player!

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134 For a much broader discussion of textual fidelity in Liszt recordings, see Fan Wei-Tsu, “Variant performances of Franz Liszt’s piano music in early recordings: a historical perspective on textual alterations” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1991).

135 Liszt, The Gipsy in Music, 301.


137 Most of these come down to us via the Liszt-Pädagogium, and many of them are reproduced as footnotes in the Neue Liszt Ausgabe, but as Hamilton has pointed out there is often a scholarly mistrust of alterations that are not in Liszt’s own handwriting. Kenneth Hamilton, Professor Kenneth Hamilton discusses Liszt’s Legacy to his Students (9 October 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaU-T8ZAHkc


140 Fay, Music Study in Germany, 251.
In the case of the Hungarian Rhapsodies a few hints at what these alterations might be like can be found by comparing the treatment of similar material in the earlier *Magyar rapszódiák*—presuming that the kinds of things he did in the written versions might represent his improvisatory practice. For example, this tune from *Magyar rapszódiák* No.20 (Examples 14, 15, 16) is first declaimed in simplicity, before being treated to several variations.

(Example 14, Bars 16–21, *Magyar rapszódiák* No.20)

(Example 15, Bars 27–31, *Magyar rapszódiák* No.20)

(Example 16, Bars 38–40, *Magyar rapszódiák* No.20)

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542 Another curious example where we have clear source material which is then developed into a larger Hungarian-style improvisation: the two versions of the transcription of “Ungarisch”, from the collection of 24 violin pieces by Ferdinand David (transcribed by Liszt 1850, published 1851 and later in 1874) (both versions can be found in II/24 of the *Neue Liszt Ausgabe*).
543 The same material is treated in Hungarian Rhapsody No.6 in a much more economical fashion.
The question is to what extent Liszt expected his students, and players of his music, to invent these things for themselves. In 1877 Nadine Helbig brought a young American, Margaret Chanler to him:

A student played one of Liszt’s own Rhapsodies; it had been practised conscientiously, but did not satisfy the master. There were splashy arpeggios and rockets of rapidly ascending chromatic diminished sevenths. ‘Why don’t you play it this way?’ asked Liszt, sitting at the second piano and playing the passage with more careless bravura. ‘It was not written so in my copy,’ objected the youth. ‘Oh, you need not take that so literally,’ answered the composer. He intended his Rhapsodies to be played rhapsodically, with a certain character of improvisation.

As quoted above, Siloti relays an anecdote which suggests that Liszt was not averse to certain people altering these compositions:

I once brought the 14th Rhapsody to play to him, telling him beforehand that I had dared to make some alterations in it, and even to omit certain passages, and that I had wanted his opinion on it. After I had played it he said: ‘I not only acquiesce in, but thoroughly approve of what you have done, in proof whereof I give you my permission to make any alterations and omissions you wish -- and this at any time, even after I am gone; for I know that what you consider necessary will not be detrimental to the music -- indeed you may say in such cases that it is as I wished it. You have my sanction in advance to anything you may do in my name; only,” he added with a smile, “please don’t sign my cheques.”

Friedheim attributed Liszt’s indifference in this area to be the cause of the poor critical reception of the Rhapsodies:

Without effort, Liszt was capable of improvising a little rhapsody, treating and combining Hungarian airs in novel fashion, and, as a matter of fact, many of this series was the result of such happy inspiration. Thereupon, pianists, instead of regarding this as the result of an extraordinary gift quite peculiar to Liszt, formed the opinion that the rhapsody was not to be taken seriously, and everybody considered himself entitled to treat the musical world to a newly devised and “disarranged” edition. Sad to say, Liszt himself approved of such extravaganza. Great in every respect, he was equally great in sanctioning those liberties, either out of kindness, indifference, or in a whimsical mood.

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144 Possibly Rhapsody No.9 (Pester Carneval)
145 Quoted in Williams, Portraits of Liszt, 551.
146 Siloti, My Memories of Liszt, 359.
He goes on to say that textual liberties, *tastelessly applied*, do nothing but distort the meaning of the music. The common virtuoso who treats these works with a careless stylistic ignorance does irreversible harm to the public opinion of the composition which Liszt actually penned:

John Smith, famous as a brilliant virtuoso, plays a rarely heard rhapsody in a town where he has not previously performed it, and a great part of the audience awaits the work with anticipation. Possibly he introduces the first bars by doubling the theme in octaves, contrary to the wishes of the composer; he exaggerates cymbalum effects, which Liszt uses with discrimination and finesse...and shocks the initiated listener by introducing these effects where they are not even implied. He omits entire sections, alters the succession of others, nay, he borrows some from a different number of the series. So finally the output represents a crude compilation, which is an etymologically correct translation of the word “rhapsody.” Those of the audience who possess the instinct of the style dislike the piece, owing to its grotesque lack of balance. Others, impressed by the clever technical display, purchase the music which does not contain what they heard; disappointed, they lay it aside. But the majority retains nothing excepting a dim recollection that this rhapsody does not amount to much, and thus the *vox populi* has asserted itself once again. ⁴⁴⁸

An example of the kind of playing which Friedheim might be railing against can be found in Mark Hambourg’s recordings of the Rhapsodies (1926–35). ⁴⁹⁸ He throws in all manner of splashy octaves, chords, tremolos, arpeggios and the like, with a seemingly complete lack of care for style or accuracy. His was the first recording of the complete cycle (Nos.1–15), and the fact that somebody was willing to invest in the production of this set might give some indication of the general propensity for this kind of interpretation. However, it is very significant that Friedheim doesn’t censure all textual alteration, permitting a sensitive approach which might enhance effectiveness:

> With the exception of the petty pedant, none would censure the performer who occasionally appropriates passages, reinforces a bass, a chord, or extends a cadenza over the few keys that lie beyond the range of the Lisztian piano, and other trifles of this kind. ⁵⁰⁰

It is precisely this approach that we find in the recordings of Liszt’s pupils. All of the recordings surveyed make some greater or lesser deviation, cut or alteration. None of the pupils are afraid to add octaves or arpeggiate chords—though none come close to Stavenhagen in terms of liberalty, who hardly lets a bar go by without some addition, most of which are shocking by modern standards. They are, however, on a very different spectrum to those found in Hambourg’s recordings. While Stavenhagen’s alterations may be obscene and would probably see him laughed off the present-day stage, his recording never sounds banal or cheap; it all seems within the scope of the style, and is played with utmost conviction. Stavenhagen’s roll is subtitled as played “according to personal recollections of Liszt.” One can’t help but wonder how closely the recording actually resembles Liszt’s

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⁴⁹⁸ Friedheim is not afraid to name names, he singles out Sophie Menter and Vera Timanoff, both pupils of the composer, as culprits of Rhapsody-thrashing. Lachmund and Borodin report two separate instances of Timanoff having lessons on different Rhapsodies with Liszt. She recorded Rhapsody No.1 on Welte-Mignon roll.
own playing. By many accounts when Liszt sat down to play in his masterclasses, it made his all his pupils seem like children by comparison, even those ones who went on to become world-famous pianists in their own right—so it might be safe to assume Stavenhagen’s is but a shadow of what Liszt’s pianism was really like. This in itself raises several questions about the philosophy of our art, and our role as performers: should we aim to play like Liszt—the-Pianist did—that is in a manner akin to professor extemporising on a topic he knows well, where the main bullet-points and sequence of ideas are predetermined, but the details left to the spur of the moment... Or is our job merely to read, with more or less correctness, the version of the piece that Liszt—the-Composer wrote down? This might lead to larger questions about when the work ceases to be the work; or why he should have bothered with writing works down at all, and with such scrupulous detail, if we were supposed to change it all anyway... For the most part, his pupils seem to have erred on the side of caution, and played largely what is on the page, but were not afraid to enhance it when inspiration called for it.

Chapter 6: Tempo Flexibility

In Des Bohémiens, Liszt identifies flexibility of tempo and rhythm as the other primary characteristic of Gypsy performance, as quoted above:

The succession, combination and enlacement of these rhythms render them marvellously apt to awaken poetical images in the mind—characteristic as they are either of fire, flexibility, dash, undulation, verve or fantastic caprice.... Nevertheless, these rhythms assume a gait which is not only free in itself but freely treated. There are no trepidations to be met with, no hesitations similar to those of the waltz or the mazurka. On the other hand, their diversity is infinite. Their rule is to have no rule.152

Clearly some freedom of tempo is expected in the Rhapsodies. In the case of Rhapsody No.12, the notation itself is fairly detailed with regard to ritardandi and accelerandi, and most of the pupils observe them as written, though to varying degrees. However, none of the pupils refrain from altering the tempo in places where it is not marked. It is worth examining Liszt’s attitude to this issue in a general sense, considering he felt the need to write about it on numerous occasions. Liszt was clearly not afraid of tempo flexibility, as Carl Reinecke wrote of Liszt’s playing in 1840:

He began with Beethoven’s Sonata in C sharp minor, quasi una fantasia; and I very well remember being delighted with his matchless rendering of the first two movements as I was astonished at the rhythmic liberties he took in the last.153

153 Williams, Portrait of Liszt, 145
There are several published sources relating to conducting his orchestral works in which Liszt expresses his feelings on the matter of tempo flexibility. In the oft-quoted “Liszt on Conducting” (1853), Liszt writes how, in Romantic era music, strict time-keeping often distorts musical sense—conductors should be sensitive to the nuances of rhythm, and not be human metronomes.

These works, starting with Beethoven’s last style, to my mind demand from soloists and orchestras alike...a progress in the style of execution itself, in accentuation, in rhythm, in the manner of phrasing and declaiming certain passages, and of distributing light and shade. This establishes between the musicians and conductor a natural link which is quite different from the one cemented in to position by an imperturbable beating of time. In many cases, even the rough, literal maintenance of time and of each continuous bar [1,2,3,4,][1,2,3,4,] clashes with the sense and the expression. There, as elsewhere, the letter killeth the spirit, a thing to which I will never subscribe... In my opinion, the real task of a conductor is making himself seem superfluous. We are helmsmen, not oarsmen.\(^{154}\)

In the preface to his Symphonic Poems (1856), Liszt makes a similar comment on how conductors ought to be sensitive to the rhetorical nature of the music, if his works are to be successful in performance—even though he has made every endeavour to notate his intentions, he writes that it would be a mistake to believe that notation could capture all the necessary nuances:

At the same time I shall observe that works of this kind demand to be manipulated with more care, suppleness, and understanding of the effects of color, rhythm, and expression than is generally used in many orchestras. It is not enough for a composition to be regularly beaten and mechanically executed with more or less correctness, if the composer is to recognize the faithful interpretation of his thought. The vital nerve of a fine symphonic performance lies principally in the understanding of the reproduced work, which the conductor must possess especially and communicate to the orchestra: in the manner of dividing and accenting the phrases; accentuating the contrasts by managing the transitions; ensuring that the various instruments are balanced; and when they are to be brought out either individually or in groups. For at one time it is necessary to simply play or mark the notes, but at other times it is about phrasing, singing, and even declaiming. It is up to the conductor to indicate to each member of the orchestra the meaning of the role he has to fulfill.

I have endeavored to render my intentions with regard to the nuances, the acceleration and the retardation of time, etc. as sensitively as possible with a detailed use of signs and expressions marks; nevertheless, it would be an illusion to believe that the beauty and the character of execution can be fixed on paper. The secret lies in the talent and inspiration of the leading and performing artists—sympathetic treatment of my works is the best guarantee of success.\(^{155}\)

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\(^{155}\) Liszt, Preface to Symphonic Poems, (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, n.d.[1857]). (my translation) Clive Brown translates part of this in Classic and Romantic Performance Practice, 27:

...Liszt’s comment, in the preface to the collected edition of his symphonic poems, that he wished to ‘see an end to mechanical, fragmented up and down playing, tied to the bar-line, which is still the rule in many places and can only acknowledge as appropriate the phrase-based style of performance, with the prominence of special accents and the rounding off of melodic rhythmic shading, [den periodischen Vortrag, mit dem Hervortreten der besonderen Accente und der Abrundung der melodischen und rhythmischen Nuancierung, als sachgemäß anerkennen kann.]
Liszt went even further in a footnote to part of his oratorio Die Legende von der Heiligen Elisabeth (1869), saying that he would like to ban the usual kind of strict-time conducting from all of his works:

At this point and at the entrance of the chorus, the orchestra should sound transfigured. The conductor is asked to scarcely mark the beats, and since this has been said, it should be added, that the composer considers the usual time-beating (Taktschlagen) as an unseemly, senseless, and brutal habit; and would like to ban it from all his works. Music is a succession of tones which enclose one another, and should not be chained by time beating (Taktprügel)!

In a letter to Lebert regarding their joint edition of Schubert’s piano works, Liszt writes that while he considers metronomical performances to be nonsensical, it is very difficult to notate the required nuances with any meaningful accuracy (1870):

With regard to the deceptive Tempo rubato...[it] may be left to the taste and momentary feeling of gifted players. A metronomical performance is certainly tiresome and nonsensical; time and rhythm must be adapted to and identified with the melody, the harmony, the accent and the poetry...But how indicate all this? I shudder at the thought of it.  

Amy Fay writes of how even when playing with an orchestra, Liszt felt no need to play strictly in time:

One of the pieces he played was...one of his own Rhapsodies Hongroises. Of these I was at the rehearsal...I was enchanted to have an opportunity to hear Liszt as a concert player. The director of the orchestra...is a beautiful pianist and composer himself, as well as a splendid conductor, but it was easy to see that he had to get all his wits together to follow Liszt, and who gave full rein to his imagination, and let the tempo fluctuate as he felt inclined.

Arthur Friedheim writes on Liszt as Composer, and how the chief difficulty for interpreters of Liszt’s works is the need for incredible flexibility of tempo while simultaneously needing to maintain a larger sense of structure:

The difficulty with Liszt’s music is its style....By nature, Liszt was a rhapsodist and improviser, and this lends a singular charm to his music, quite aside from all its other qualities. But he was a rhapsodist in his own way; he never improvised without design....The difficulty which Liszt’s interpreters run into, even today, is the flexibility demanded of them. There is tempo rubato even when one seems to be facing an almost Roman structure. And yet the thread of the line of development in Liszt’s construction must unfold smoothly and without interruption.

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156 Liszt, Die Legende von der Heiligen Elisabeth (Leipzig: C.F. Kahnt, n.d.[1869]), 64. Walker translates the last sentence as: “Music is a succession of tones which cleave to one another, self-contained... and they are not to be joined by thrashing out the beats.” Walker, vol 2: Weimar Years, 282–3 n34.
158 Probably the Hungarian Fantasy, a version of Rhapsody No.14 for piano and orchestra.
159 Fay, Music Study in Germany, 251.
160 Friedheim, Life and Liszt, 189.
Steinberg reproduces a section from Czerny’s *Pianoforte School, Op.500* which gives an extremely detailed description of the kind of approach that that master expected—hardly a note of Czerny’s 16 bar example should apparently be played without some greater or lesser rhythmic inflection.

Steinberg suggests that Czerny’s ideas may well represent Liszt’s approach in spirit, if not exact detail:

> Whether or not Liszt would have agreed with every detail discussed by Czerny is moot, yet the fact remains that Liszt was brought up to regard time as partially consisting of an avoidance of “the metronomic style.” This was certainly one of the basic characteristics of Liszt’s playing. The degree of freedom which Liszt employed depended on the style and content of the works he played. ¹⁶¹

By contrast, Göllerich quotes Liszt, much later in life, with quite the opposite sentiment:

> The cultivation of rhythm I consider one of the best educative measures. It was entirely wanting in Moscheles’ playing. ¹⁶²

Göllerich goes on to describe, in his own words, how an overcooked use of such tools in order to create a spectacle was not likely to please Liszt, at least in his old age:

> Striving after effect he loathed as much in musical performance as in composing and in life; and, equally, playing of the sickly-sentimental variety on the one hand or the mechanical and pedantic on the other. ¹⁶³

This would seem to imply that liberties are always to be bound by the ever elusive *good taste*, and must be only be used to enhance the character of the music, and should never distort it.

D’Albert, in the preface to his edition of the Hungarian Rhapsodies, writes that the flexibility of rhythm implied by the Gypsy style would make attaching metronome marks troublesome:

> The manner of interpreting these works is so widely known that I have refrained from the attempt of forcing them into one narrow channel of academic rules. It has been my principal aim to furnish the dynamic signs and to sometimes add such embellishments as the Master would have approved of... Metronome—marks I have naturally abstained from putting, as much in pieces like these wild children of the Puszta, which are always moving in rhapsodic rubato—rhythms, such directions would be sheer folly. ¹⁶⁴

Presumably it is not the giving of tempos per se that is the issue here, but the fact that metronome marks might imply a *consistent or strict* tempo to players, which would be in opposition to the rhetorical style of the Rhapsodies. This thought did not stop Liszt from attaching metronome marks to the four late Rhapsodies (Nos.16–19) ¹⁶⁵—could this suggest that students had often got the tempo of...

¹⁶² Quoted in Williams, *Portrait of Liszt*, 634.
¹⁶³ Ibid., 634.
¹⁶⁴ D’Albert, preface.
¹⁶⁵ There are also metronome marks given for Rhapsodies Nos.3 and 5, in the *Liszt-Pädagogium*. See Pace, “Liszt and the *Style hongrois*.”
the older Rhapsodies wrong, and so Liszt felt the need to give precise numbers? Liszt may have suddenly changed his views on metronomical performance; but given the rather blunt quotations above—he was clearly perturbed by insensitive performances. In this place, one is reminded of the lamentation which Beethoven penned on the autograph copy of a song:

100 according to Mälzel; but this must be held applicable to only the first measures, for feeling also has its own tempo and cannot entirely be expressed by this figure [i.e., 100].

Lachmund offers the following description of the kind of effect produced by Liszt’s *rubato*; distinguished by a characteristic hesitation upon important notes, but without overly distorting the sense of time:

His phrasing was so illuminating that any familiar piece coming from under his fingers became a revelation. The Liszt rubato is a momentary halting of the time by a slight pause on some significant note and when rightly done, brings out the phrasing in a way that is declamatory and remarkably convincing. In playing Liszt seemed unmindful of the time, and yet the symmetry of the rhythm did not seem disturbed. Never before or since have I heard any other pianist phrase as Liszt did—so convincingly, so enchantingly that it seemed to hypnotize one.

This might well be to say that Liszt did not usually modify the rhythm of a passage in such a way that it could be misconstrued as some other rhythm; rather that he exaggerated the rhythmic gestures without concern for the mathematical accuracy of rhythmic subdivisions. If one note is lengthened slightly, the next one might be rushed over—while the underlying pulse may stay more—or—less in place. This description is one which reflects the practice found in the playing of several of Liszt’s pupils—short ornaments, particularly, tend to be played quicker than written, often with a slight pause on the first note.

There are a few trends which emerge from side-by-side comparison. All of the pupils speed up in the descending passage in Bars 12–13 (Example 17), even before the marked stringendo:

(Example 17, Bars 12–13)

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166 Given the consistency of these late metronome marks, one could perhaps experiment with adapting them to Rhapsodies Nos.1–15.

167 For further discussion of various issues relating to historical use of the metronome, see Marten Noorduin, *Czerny’s ‘impossible’ metronome marks*, (Vol 154, No. 1925, Winter 2013).


In the *Un poco più lento* section, Friedheim and von Sauer both create the same effect of giving, what feels like, an imperceptible pause on the main beats by delaying the entry of the ornaments *ever so slightly*. The pulse itself does not appear to be affected, but the gesture has an incredible charm and elegance. Given that Friedheim and von Sauer both seem to have played the Rhapsody for Liszt, one wonders if this trick comes from the Master himself. This may well be what Liszt intended by the marking ‘in *tempo ad libitum*’ which adorns this phrase. (See Examples 4 and 8)

All of the pupils, with the exception of von Sauer dot the second last note of the ornament on the first beat of Bar 27. (Example 18) They must all have recognised this ornament as a disguised *bókázó* or “Hungarian” cadence figure, similar to the one that appears three bars later in Bar 30.\(^{51}\)

(Example 18, Bars 27-30)

In the section marked *Allegro zingarese*, all of the recordings surveyed characterise it with a ‘push and pull’ kind of tempo fluctuation.\(^{52}\) All of the players slow down before accenting and elongating the chord before the cadential figure in Bar 51. (Example 19) They each release the tension in a different way, either by slowing down or speeding up over the cadence.

(Example 19, Bars 48–53)

Most of the pupils slow down in Bar 142, perhaps to match with the *rit.* in the phrase which follows:

(Example 20, Bars 139-145)

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\(^{52}\) We hear precisely the same process in the Gypsy band recordings of Rhapsodies Nos.2 and 14 in the similar sections in those pieces (see n.64)
Conclusion

What is a virtuoso? Is he really no more than an intelligent machine, whose two hands are a couple of levers doing the business of a barrel-organ? Is his task so mechanical as to render it unnecessary for him to think or feel in satisfactorily performing it? Is his duty confined to producing for the ear, as it were, a photograph of notes he is looking at? Alas! We know only too well how many so-called virtuosi there are who are not even able to translate the thought contained in the originals they place upon their desk, or to deliver it integrally without mutilation of the sense. How many amongst them there are whose knowledge of art is confined to the mere trade—how many, indeed, who do not even know the trade? 

This dissertation has set out to illuminate not only the aesthetics and contextual background of Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies, but also, and most importantly, to shed light on a long forgotten style of playing by recourse to the sound recordings of a series of Liszt’s distinguished pupils. When these two strands are considered together, a picture emerges regarding these works that markedly differs from their modern reception. In place of shallow virtuosity and ingenuine fireworks my research suggests that the Hungarian Rhapsodies, when properly understood, are works of an entirely different nature. To my ears, the playing on these historic recordings is meaningful, expressive, free and entirely natural. These traits, significantly, are unable to be transmitted through notation alone.

The recordings as a whole demonstrate a certain amount of freedom with regard to rhythm and textual fidelity. In terms of freedom, a wide range is evident, with Reisenauer at the least flexible and Stavenhagen the most. But every student makes some change—everything from un-notated arpeggiation, adding or altering cadenzas, to cutting, swapping or completely inventing entirely new sections. In the case of the disc recordings, some of the straight cuts may well be due to side limitations... but as these kinds of liberties are no longer an essential part of piano playing in the twenty first century, it is surely noteworthy that all of these recordings do something different. It is an evident truth that much of this performance style evades written description—both in words and notation. For those of us who are not so fortunate as to live in Hungary, the studying of recordings offers perhaps the only path to enlightenment.

The kind of analysis which has been employed here incorporates a practical element—it is possible to sit at the piano and play the Rhapsody à la Friedheim; following his rubatos and alterations. It then remains up to pianists to experiment with and extrapolate from these ideas in order to try and understand the thought processes of Friedheim, and hopefully thereby getting closer to Liszt himself. Once we understand some of the what and, perhaps more importantly, the why, we are surely then moving towards being able to perform these works with the sensitivity and respect they deserve.

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\(^{73}\) Liszt, The Gipsy in Music, 264.
Appendix

Key

Pause

Agogic Accent (lengthening, shorter than pause)

Dynamic Accent

Ritardando, Ritenuto

Accelerando, Stringendo

Arpeggiato

Luftpause (breath pause, silence)

Phrase break (usually with silence, shorter than breath pause)

Emphasised inner voice

Note placement (synchronisation of the hands)
Freidheim

de Greef

Reisenauer

Siloti

von Sauer

Weiss
Freidheim

de Greef

Reisenauer

Siloti

von Sauer

Weiss
Freidheim

de Greef

Reisenauer

Siloti

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Siloti

von Sauer

Weiss
Freidheim

de Greef

Reisenauer

Siloti

von Sauer

Weiss
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**General 19th-Century Piano Performance Practice**

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Studies of Historical Recordings
# Discography

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**NON Liszt Pupils (Born in the Nineteenth Century)**

| Backhaus, Wilhelm (1884-1960) | No. 2 in C-Sharp Minor | disc recording | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcJU9kdvuYk |
| Barth, Hans (1887-1956) | No. 12 in C-Sharp Minor | disc recording | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmDz4DumxNs |
| Busoni, Ferruccio (1866-1924) | No. 10 in E Major | Ampico piano roll-recording | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ajg500xjy0 |
| Carreño, Teresa (1863–1907) | No. 10 in E Major | Welte-Mignon piano roll recording | eliced PAA-008 |
| Cortot, Alfred (1877-1962) | No. 10 in E Major | Welte-Mignon piano roll recording | The Caswell Collection, Vol. 10 - Pierian Recording Society PIR0039-40 |
| Friedman, Igor (1882-1948) | No. 12 in C-Sharp Minor | Welte-Mignon piano roll recording | eliced PAA-008 |
| | No. 12 in C-Sharp Minor | disc recording - Columbia Records (1930 or 1935) | The Caswell Collection, Vol. 10 - Pierian Recording Society PIR0039-40 |
| Grainger, Percy (1882-1960) | No. 14 in F major | Piano roll | Nimbus NIB10105 |
| | (abridged) No. 15 in A minor "Rákóczi March" | disc recording | (Vn/vp) International Piano Archives – IPA 117 |
| Hambourg, Mark (1879-1960) | COMPLETE 1-15 | disc recording (1926-1925) | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ajg500xjy0 |
| Hoffmann, Josef (1876-1957) | No. 12 in C-Sharp Minor | disc recording (1922) | eliced PAA-008 |
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| | No. 8 in F-Sharp Minor | disc recording | eliced PAA-008 |
| | No. 8 in F-Sharp Minor | disc recording | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ajg500xjy0 |
| | No. 6 in D-Flat Major | disc recording | eliced PAA-008 |
| | No. 6 in D-Flat Major | disc recording | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ajg500xjy0 |
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**Recording Type**

- eleced PAA-008
- eleced PAA-012
- Symphonie Records SYMP104
- PIR0039-40, Gerard Carter (Rediscovering the Liszt Tradition)