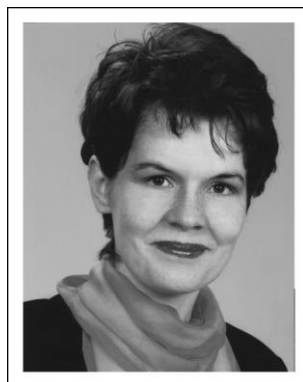


FRANZ LISZT– PARAPHRASE FOR PIANO ON MISERERE FROM VERDI'S IL TROVATORE

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ABSTRACT

The present study provides a brief analysis of Liszt's *Paraphrase* on motifs/themes from *Miserere* from Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. The paraphrase – a less known and less popular instrumental genre in the repertoire of concert pianists today, enjoyed a spectacular flourishing during the 19th century. The term itself, despite its various quasi-synonymous forms dating back as far as the Baroque era, is invariably linked to Liszt, renowned for his propensity for highly virtuosic improvisations on famous and mostly opera-inspired themes of the time. The phenomenon of musical "quotations" was frequently encountered: transcriptions, piano reductions and paraphrases made up the favourite musical repertoire of the musical evenings held in the aristocratic salons of the time. The musical quotation is rendered either *ad litteram* or not, sometimes in allusive, free, typically Romantic forms, then metamorphosed into dense, figurative developments, of high expressiveness and richness and especially of immense technical difficulty. The paper offers a comparative approach to the similarities and differences in writing, form, musical dramaturgy and timber, in the two musical pieces: Verdi's original and List's paraphrase for piano, while also highlighting the intrinsic relationship between vocality and instrumentality.

Keywords: paraphrase, piano virtuosity, figurative thematic developments, vocality/instrumentality, musical quotation, opera, Liszt, Verdi

Introduction

A mysterious and inexplicable whirligig of time brought Verdi and Liszt together in 2011, in the same stylistic, artistic and commemorative/chronological context: the celebration of 200 years since the birth of Franz Liszt (1811-1876) and the commemoration of 110 years since the death of Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901).

The masterpieces created by these two composers fall into two major genres: opera and piano works. Anyone who says Verdi, implicitly says "opera". Anyone who speaks/hears/reads about Liszt, will inherently think of a piano and of highly virtuosic piano playing.

I was attracted by the idea of associating the names and works of these two composers within the framework of the same musical "topic", and therefore I chose Liszt's *Paraphrase* for piano on themes from Verdi's *Il Trovatore* as a pretext for this essay.

Terminological considerations

There are, in the specialized terminology and especially in the current language, a series of seemingly synonymous though actually distinct concepts, the semantic contour of which is quite difficult to notice at first glance: fantasia, paraphrase, parody, reminiscences, variations etc.

A **paraphrase** is a stylistic device by which famous themes or motifs are taken (fully or partly) *ad litteram*, diverting the original musical discourse in a display of incredible interpretative virtuosity, often of an improvisatory nature, with possible changes in harmony, rhythm, tempo etc.

The etymology of the word is derived from Greek: *para* = beside, *phrasis* = way of speaking, to tell, to speak.

The *Dictionary of Musical Terms* [9] gives the following definition of *paraphrase*:

- Paraphrase = Gr. *paraphrasis*, description. Musical work based on familiar topics (usually belonging to another composer than the author of the paraphrase), containing passages of pure virtuosity

(e.g. the concert paraphrase). In the works of Liszt and of his contemporaries, paraphrases were concert improvisations on themes from fashionable operas of the day (Rossini, Weber, Wagner, Verdi, Gounod, Meyerbeer, Auber etc.).

In the 19th century, the concert paraphrase was sometimes called *réminiscences* or *fantasie*⁵⁴. Other terms belonging to the general semantic category of the paraphrase are: *reverie*, *fleur mélodique sur...*, *souvenirs de...*, *illustration sur...*, *bouquet de mélodies*, *choix de melodies* etc. These are quasi-synonymous terms, denoting the same idea of free form, of improvisation, but with varying degrees of piano technical difficulty and complexity of the musical development.

Another meaning of the term *paraphrase* dates back to the 15th and 16th centuries and assumes a pre-existing theme – usually for voice – used in a polyphonic composition (hymns, sequences, antiphons, masses). Originally, the borrowed melody was assigned exclusively to the tenor voice (e.g. Dufay's Mass *Ave regina caelorum*). Later, towards the end of the 15th century, in Josquin's Mass *Pange lingua* or in Palestrina's masses inspired from hymns, the paraphrased melody would shift from one voice to another, in an imitative texture.

- **Transcription** = musical arrangement for another/other instruments than those the original work was written for.
- **Transposition** = writing or playing the same musical material in a different key from the original.
- **Transcription** = 1. the same musical material in a different key; 2. equivalence/rewriting/dictation of old music notations (Byzantine, Gregorian, Oriental) with contemporary European notation; 3. notation "by ear" or after prior sound recordings of oral (folk) music.
- **Reduction** = symphonic, vocal-symphonic work arranged for a smaller ensemble, most commonly for piano/piano 4 hands.

⁵⁴ During the 16th and 17th centuries, the fantasia – a mostly polyphonic instrumental genre (close to the *ricercar*, *canzona*, *toccata*) – reached its peak in the works of Bach and Buxtehude (e.g. *Choralfantasiën* and the frequent association fantasia – fugue). Notable among the 18th century works were Mozart's *Fantasia in C minor* for Piano, Beethoven's *Fantasia for Piano, Chorus and Orchestra* and the two sonatas for piano subtitled "quasi una fantasia", Op. 27/1, Op. 27/ 2. The 19th century: Chopin's *Fantasia for Piano* in F minor and *Fantasia-Improptu* Op. 66, *Wanderer Fantasia* by Schubert, on a melody from his lied *Der Wanderer* etc.

- **Pastiche** = a servile imitation of a style
- **Plagiarism** = the act of copying *ad litteram*.

*

The 19th century brought about the expansion of soul and romantic expression in all the forms and genres of the art: literature (novels, plays, poetry), music, fine arts and dance.

Liszt wrote a wide variety of piano transcriptions (lieder by Mendelssohn, Schubert, etc.), reductions (Beethoven's symphonies, which he used to play at his concerts) and paraphrases. It was especially the paraphrase that gave him the opportunity to display his brilliant and unparalleled pianistic virtuosity. He composed many paraphrases on famous themes: the quartet from *Rigoletto – Bella figlia dell'amore...*, *Miserere* from *Il Trovatore*, *Grande Paraphrase de la Marche* by Donizetti, the duet *La ci darem la mano* from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* – are only the best known, along with paraphrases on lieder by Schubert, Mendelssohn a.o.

In 1889, Brahms, though hardly an admirer of Liszt's music, remarked: "Everyone who wants to really know what Liszt wrote for the piano, should study his fantasias on opera themes. They represent the classicism of keyboard technique" [7].

Liszt⁵⁵ introduced the idea and term "recital". As a great admirer of Beethoven and Berlioz, his repertoire included more than 80 piano pieces,

⁵⁵ Franz Liszt (1811-1886) showed his musical talent at an early age and his parents offered him the finest artistic instruction. He made his first public appearance at the age of eight, so that by 1820, the "child prodigy" was already charming the concert hall audiences in Vienna and Paris. At the age of nine, Liszt took piano lessons from Carl Czerny in Vienna, who fostered his inclination towards virtuosity, providing him with a solid technical background. By the age of 20, Liszt had already conquered the Parisian aristocratic salons. His success opened out new paths in his life, both professionally and personally, to the hearts of the beautiful ladies. It was during one of the musical soirées that he met Countess Marie d'Agoult, who soon left her husband to spend her life with him in Switzerland and later in Italy. Liszt and Marie d'Agoult had three children together. His daughter Cosima was later to become Richard Wagner's wife. In 1847, after a concert in Kiev, the famous pianist befriended the Catholic Princess Carolyne de Sayn-Wittgenstein. Together they moved to Weimar, in 1848. However, given that divorce was not legal in those days, the couple could not be united in marriage. Their cohabitation was reluctantly accepted by the Court of Weimar. In addition to his prodigious activity as a piano virtuoso, conductor and composer, Liszt was also a notable teacher, giving lessons in piano playing and composition to talented and ambitious students. In December 1859, the composer lost his son, Daniel, and in 1862, his daughter Blandine also died. His deep sadness made him choose a solitary life at the

of which 50 he was able to play by heart. However, Liszt was not the only virtuoso of his time. There were many other great performers who shone on theatre and concert stages and in the aristocratic salons of the time: Clara Schumann, Paganini, Chopin, Thalberg, Cramer, soprano Adelina Patti, etc.

The paraphrase that constitutes the subject of this study was inspired by the *Miserere* section of Act 4, subtitled *Il Supplizio*, from Verdi's opera *Il Trovatore*⁵⁶.

It was composed in Erschienen, in 1860. (Searle's Catalogue 433)

Giuseppe Verdi, *Miserere* (Act 4) from the opera *Il Trovatore*

The scene begins with an *a cappella* chorus (tenor/bass), in *mezza voce*. The key is *A flat* minor and the tempo indication is *Andante assai sostenuto*. The double-dotted rhythm suggests a funeral march. *La Campana dei morti* (*E flat*, small octave) occurs every other bar, like a subtle allusion to the hero's imminent death. The harmonies are simple and clear, typical of the classical tonal-functional system.

The chorus is set in a simple, homophonic texture, and the overall sonorous mood is extremely gloomy and sober.

The text of the prayer: *Miserere d'un alma vicina alla partenza che non ha ritorno; miserere di lei, bonta divina; preda non sia dell'infernal soggiorno.*⁵⁷

Madonna del Rosario Monastery, not far from Rome. In 1869, the composer was invited to Weimar to give master classes in piano playing, and two years later a similar proposal came from the Hungarian Music Academy in Budapest. The artist died on July 31, 1886, at the age of 74, while he was at the Bayreuth Festival, organized by Cosima Wagner, his daughter.

⁵⁶ Here is a brief summary of the scene: Manrico is imprisoned in a tower, together with Azucena, whom he considers to be his mother, awaiting execution. He was defeated in a battle with the cruel Count Di Luna, his brother and rival for Leonora's hand. Leonora is outside the prison tower, trying to save him at the cost of her honour and eventually of her life (see the duet of Leonora and Count di Luna). Although Leonora is the only character appearing in this scene, the voices of Manrico and that of Destiny, the chorus, are also floating in the air. The scene is highly dramatic, sober and impressive through the force and simplicity of the musical and dramatic elements.

⁵⁷ It. = Have mercy on a spirit approaching the departure which has no return; have mercy on him, divine Goodness, keep him from being the prey of hell.

Example 1: Verdi, *Il Trovatore*, Act 4, *Miserere*, bars 1-5

Andante assai sostenuto (♩ = 54)
a mezza voce

T. 1
Mi - se - re - re d'un al - ma già vi - ci - na al - la par - ten - za che non ha ri - tor - no;

T. 2
Mi - se - re - re d'un al - ma già vi - ci - na al - la par - ten - za che non ha ri - tor - no;

Bar. e B.
Mi - se - re - re d'un al - ma già vi - ci - na al - la par - ten - za che non ha ri - tor - no;

Pianoforte
Andante assai sostenuto (♩ = 54)
La Campana dei morti

In her first solo intervention, Leonora's soprano voice uses the same tense and gloomy dotted rhythm of the chorus: *Qual suon, quelle preci solenni, funeste empirom quest'aere di cupo terror...*⁵⁸.

Example 2: Verdi, *Il Trovatore*, Act 4, *Miserere*, bars 10-12

Leonora
Qual suon, quel-le pre - ci so-len - ni, fu

Pianoforte
ppp

⁵⁸ It. = "That sound, those prayers, so solemn and dire, fill the air with baleful terror!"

L. ne - ste em pi-ron que st'a - e-re di cu-poter ror!

Pianoforte

This first thematic overlap is altogether impressive: her weeping and her inner turmoil vs. the inexorability of death. At the end of her intervention, the "sigh" motif, consisting of incomplete triplets, leads to Manrico's theme: *A flat* major, mellifluous, ternary in form, accompanied by the soft, sweet chords of the harp.

Example 3: Verdi, *Il Trovatore*, Act 4, *Miserere*, bars 19-20

(dalla torre)

Manrico Ah! che la mor - te o- gno - ra

Pianoforte Arpa

These three distinct segments (the *Miserere* theme, Leonora's theme, Manrico's theme) are repeated twice, with the same internal structure and order. It is only the lyrics that differ.

The highly dramatic and sublime culminating point of this section of the opera starts at bar 51: Leonora's voice "falls" *Di, di te scordarmi?*⁵⁹ and is intersected by Manrico's voice (tenor), in the thick, tense rhythm of the orchestra: the rhythmic motif of the funeral march, her response (descending, sequential motif, in small values, suggesting despair) alternating with Manrico's mellifluous and seemingly resigned response, in ternary form (bar 51). In the background, though present like a haunting reminder of the inherent and inexorable tragic outcome, the chorus repeats the same melodic and rhythmic pattern, on the word *miserere*⁶⁰.

Example 4: Verdi, *Il Trovatore*, Act 4, *Miserere*, bars 51-54

The musical score for Example 4 consists of six staves. The top staff is for Leonora, with lyrics: "Di te, di te scor-dar-mi! Di te, di te scor-dar-mi!". The second staff is for Manrico, with lyrics: "Scon-to col san-gue mi-o l'a-mor che po-si in". The third staff is for T. 1, with lyrics: "Mi-se-re-re! mi-se-re-re!". The fourth staff is for T. 2, with lyrics: "Mi-se-re-re! mi-se-re-re!". The fifth staff is for Bar. e B., with lyrics: "Mi-se-re-re! mi-se-re-re!". The bottom staff is for Pianoforte, labeled "Orch. ed Arpa" and "ppp". The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and rests, with some measures containing triplets. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/8.

⁵⁹ It. = "you, forget you?"

⁶⁰ Lat. = "have mercy"

The image shows a musical score for the 'Miserere' from Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. It includes vocal parts for Leonora, Manrico, Tenors 1 and 2, and Baritone, along with a piano accompaniment. The score is in the key of B-flat major (two flats) and 3/4 time. The lyrics are in Italian. The vocal parts feature melodic lines with various ornaments like triplets and sextuplets. The piano accompaniment consists of a rhythmic pattern of chords in the left hand and a more melodic line in the right hand, often using triplets.

Leonora
di te scor dar mi! di te scor dar mi! sen to man car - mi.

Manrico
te! Non ti scord - dar, non ti scor dar di me, ad - dio Leo no ra, ad di - o.

T. 1
mi - se-re - re! mi - se - re - re!

T. 2
mi - se-re - re! mi - se - re - re!

Bar. e B.
mi - se-re - re! mi - se - re - re!

Pianoforte

**Franz Liszt, Paraphrase for piano on *Miserere* from Verdi's *Il Trovatore*.
Differences and similarities: original / paraphrase**

As Liszt notes, the work starts with a special timbral effect, *quasi campana*. It is a "sigh" melodic cell (falling minor second) in the low register, in the left hand, which is repeated, with slight harmonic changes, throughout the entire section (1+8 bars). The *Miserere* theme remains faithful to Verdi's choral idiom in terms of register, sonorous intensity (*sotto voce*) and chordal density.

The initial tempo marking is *Lento*, as opposed to Verdi's *Andante assai sostenuto*.

Example 5: Franz Liszt, *Paraphrase* for piano, bars 1-6

Lento

quasi Campanella *sotto voce ma marcato e pesante*

8^{va} sf *sf* *sf* *sf*

col Ped.

a tempo *sempre sotto voce*

ten.

P * P * P

Manrico's *Cantabile* theme (bar 22). The harp chords are transferred to the piano in a continuous alternation of octaves (the second and third notes of the right hand triplet) and towards the end, Liszt also adds the *arpeggiato* effect. The expression marking is: *l'accompagnamento dolcissimo*. Everything is wrapped in subtle and soft nuances (*una corda*). As a pianistic feature, the theme line is carried/emphasized alternatively by both hands, each playing small "bits" to contribute to the final coherence and expressive *legato*. Manrico's theme reappears at bar 50, framed within fine but more complex /dense sonorous textures, creating a quasi *tremolo* effect through chordal figurations with note changes in the right hand. Below is an illustration of the two fragments:

Example 6: Franz Liszt, *Paraphrase for piano*, bars 22-25

Example 7: Franz Liszt, *Paraphrase for piano*, bars 50-53

Bar 29 marks the beginning of sheer pianistic virtuosity: parallel thirds in the right hand, in dense and fast bursts of sixteenth-note triplets,

accompany the *Miserere* theme (*un poco pesante*). Here, the funeral effect that Verdi produced through the rhythmic pattern (double-dotted rhythm) is achieved through *tremolos* in contra octave, marked *Sforzando* and with strong accents, in *marcato* style.

Example 8: Franz Liszt, *Paraphrase for piano*, bars 29-32

At bar 37, the left hand takes over the virtuoso element in chromatic figurations, ascending/descending scales and thirty-second-note values; the right hand undertakes Leonora's musical themes ("strengthened" by parallel chords/octaves), intersected by chordal interventions reminiscent of the *miserere* theme.

Example 9: Franz Liszt, *Paraphrase for piano*, bars 37-38

At bar 72, Leonora's theme is divided, in terms of the pianistic devices used, into a continuous alternation between the two hands, in parallel octaves, in the middle range of the piano (*ben marcato la melodia*). The predominance of the virtuoso element in the right hand takes the form of long, three-octave ascending arpeggios. The same distant modulation (*A flat* → *B major*) occurs here as well, in the same way as in the first similar "variation" on Leonora's theme (bar 60).

Example 10: Franz Liszt, *Paraphrase for piano*, bar 72

The culminating point mentioned above in Verdi's version (the motivic overlap of the three planes) begins at bar 60, *molto appassionato*. The countless figurations – ascending/descending arpeggios in the left hand – accompany the second theme like an endless musical flow. Leonora's theme gradually loses its tension and rigour and becomes softer and lighter (see the markings *dolce molto appassionato, piano dolce*).

Initially in the same key, i.e. *A flat major*, Leonora's theme returns two bars later, transposed a semitone higher (*B major*), in parallel octaves, in the high register of the piano (an octave higher than in Verdi).

From Manrico's musical phrase, Liszt "cuts out" only the last notes, which he sets in the same register of the piano (right hand) and always marks *rinforzando, poco rall.*

Example 11: Franz Liszt, *Paraphrase for piano*, bars 60-63

The musical score for Example 11, Franz Liszt's *Paraphrase for piano*, bars 60-63, is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a right-hand (RH) and left-hand (LH) part. The first system is in A-flat major and begins with the tempo marking 'a tempo' and dynamic 'p dolce' in the RH, and 'p dolce' in the LH. The second system is in B major and begins with 'a tempo' and 'p dolce' in the RH, and 'Pedale 4 fots par mesure' in the LH. The third system is in B major and begins with 'a tempo' and 'p dolce' in the RH, and 'Pedale 4 fots par mesure' in the LH. The score includes various performance markings such as 'rinforzando', 'poco rall.', and 'rinforz. poco rall.'.



Conclusions

The general markings of expression are much more nuanced: *sotto voce ma marcato e pesante, dolce molto appassionato, marcatissimo, incalzando, ben marcato la melodia etc.*

The choral idiom maintains its granite-like structure, but the figurative, variational contexts of great pianistic virtuosity it is integrated in impregnate it with harsher and more incisive colors.

Metric differences: in Verdi – quadruple meter (with the melodic material of the orchestral accompaniment displaying a ternary subdivision, in eighth-note triplet patterns); in Liszt – 12/8 meter.

Also inserted are indications for the use of the pedal – a characteristic feature in piano writing.

A short cadence also occurs, notated accordingly, i.e. *Cadenza* (bar 57) – a characteristic element of the highly virtuosic concertos and instrumental works. This was all the more inevitable in Liszt, as almost all bars in his paraphrases can be considered as being ... "cadential" (!)

Vocal expressiveness, in *bel canto* style, is suggested and often emphasized by a continuous expressive *legato*, with the main melodic lines being often highlighted by doublings at the octave and/or explicit markings of expression.

To paraphrase⁶¹ Liszt's paraphrase, a spectacular display of extreme dramatic power, the ethos of this special moment – *Miserere* – is more intense, at times even blatantly so, vacillating between faithfulness to the sobriety and imminence of the tragic outcome outlined in Verdi's vocal/orchestral lines, and the figurative, variational developments defying the inherent laws and limitations of the piano, transgressing the boundaries of keyboard technique

⁶¹ (Gr.) *para* = beside.

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ANNEX

Paraphrases by Franz Liszt⁶²

- *Rigoletto* by Verdi – Concert Paraphrase
- *Il trovatore* by Verdi – Concert Paraphrase
- *Ernani* by Verdi – Concert Paraphrase
- *Faust* by Gounod (waltz) – Concert araphrase
- *Aida* by Verdi – *Danza sacra e duetto finale*
- *Romeo et Juliette* – *Réverie sur un motif de l'opéra de Gounod*
- *Sonnambula* by Bellini – *Grande fantasia de concert*
- *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Donizetti – *Marche funèbre et Cavatine for 2 pianos*
- *Grande paraphase de la marche de Donizetti*
- *Les Huguenots* by Meyerbeer – *Réminiscences. Grande fantaisie de concert*
- *Lucrezia Borgia* – *Fantasie sur des motifs favoris de l'opéra de Donizetti – Réminiscences*
- *Simone Boccanegra* by Verdi – *Réminiscences*
- *Don Carlo* by Verdi – *Coro e Marcia Funebre*
- *I Lombardi, Salve Regina de Jerusalem* by Verdi
- *Valse à capriccio sur 2 motifs de "Lucia..." et "Parisina"..."* by Donizetti
- *Requiem, Agnus Dei* by Verdi – Paraphrase
- *Totentanz, Paraphrase über das Dies irae*

⁶² the list is not exhaustive.

THE TEACHING METHODS OF ECCLESIASTICAL MUSIC – PSALTIC ART (10TH-19TH CENTURIES)

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