

of visual and verbal cues scattered throughout can help one track the music with the action in the film.

The rarity of such a published score alone makes it a great addition to any music library. The introduction, as previously stated, has a slew of issues, but the score itself in an easy-to-read layout is a great point of study for anyone interested in film music. The score is also a useful tool for any professor teaching music in film or composing for film since teaching with a print score in its

entirety, rather than relying on a transcription or a recording, would be far more favorable in many regards. The recentness of the score and its popularity would make an interesting and engaging case study to pair alongside older scores from the Omni collection or elsewhere of similar structure and breadth in either a film music class or a scholarly article.

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LISZT'S UNFINISHED OPERA *SARDANAPALO*

Franz Liszt. *Sardanapalo*. Atto Primo : fragment. Edited by David Trippett. Libretto reconstructed by Marco Beghelli in collaboration with Francesca Vella and David Rosen. Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 2019. (*New Edition of the Complete Works*. Serie IX, Vocal works with orchestra or several instruments; Band 2.) [1 vocal score (xxxvi, 141 p.) ISMN: 9790080200179, \$169]

For more than fifty years, the *New Edition of the Complete Works / Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, published by Editio Musica Budapest, has been the most authoritative source for Franz Liszt's music. Yet despite releasing fifty-seven volumes to date, the *New Edition of the Complete Works (New Liszt Edition [NLE])* has never ventured beyond series I and II (including supplemental volumes), which are devoted exclusively to solo piano music. General editors like Zoltán Gardonyi, István Szélenyi, Adrienne Kaczmarczyk, and Imre Mező have treated the etudes, the Hungarian Rhapsodies, the Sonata in B Minor, and a huge swath of some of the nineteenth century's most difficult piano music with reverence and care. But Liszt, who spent much of his professional life trying to dispel the notion that he was "just" a pianist's composer, might wonder about the *NLE's* focus, given that his four-hand piano music, songs, symphonic poems, and a *cappella*

choral music, and more, still await authoritative, modern critical editions.

Thus, the appearance of David Trippett's edition as volume 2 of series IX, "Vocal works with orchestra or with several instruments," marks a decisive and welcome step for the *NLE*. The work in question, *Sardanapalo*, seems an unlikely candidate for this honor: Liszt never finished the opera, despite actively developing it in the second half of the 1840s and writing music for it in the early 1850s; the archivist and Liszt biographer Peter Raabe dismissed its piecemeal state around 1911; and in 1996 the pianist and Liszt scholar, Kenneth Hamilton, deemed it a prime example of how "the amount of talk is often in inverse proportion to the action" ("Not With a Bang But a Whimper: The Death of Liszt's *Sardanapale*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 8, no. 1 [1996]: 45). Yet Trippett has demonstrated otherwise, and through Herculean efforts of archival research, source study, style

analysis, and interdisciplinary collaboration has produced an edition that is highly readable, mostly playable, occasionally baffling, frequently intriguing, and altogether eminently rewarding.

Consistent with all volumes of the *NLE*, Trippett's edition is organized into four large sections: preface, music, appendix, and critical report. The preface is devoted primarily to the work's genesis. Trippett situates *Sardanapalo* among the many operatic projects that Liszt considered during the 1840s—projects which, when fulfilled, would prove his compositional worth to a European public that knew him almost exclusively as an exceptional pianist. Indeed, copious but unfocused references in his correspondence during this decade to Scott, Sand, Schiller, Goethe, and other writers attest to the importance and urgency that Liszt placed on scoring an operatic hit. He seems to have settled on Byron's *Corsaire* around 1843, but problems with the libretto caused him to abandon the project by 1844. By late 1845, he had settled on another work by Byron, the five-act *Sardanapalus* of 1821, and enlisted the help of Princess Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso, known today among Lisztians as host for the famous duel between Liszt and Sigismond Thalberg that took place in her salon on 31 March 1837.

Liszt had had a decent artistic relationship with Marie d'Agoult in the 1830s, producing the *Lettres d'un bachelier ès musique*, and he would again work with another woman of letters, Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, in the 1850s on various pieces of writing, including *Berlioz and His "Harold" Symphony*, which laid out his influential ideas on program music. In partnering with Belgiojoso, Liszt gained a discerning, well-connected collaborator who could have realistically helped fulfill Liszt's goal of producing a stand-out Italian opera. Unfortunately, their arrangement was ill-conceived and

its execution clumsy. She was to commission a libretto from an unnamed poet. Only after revising and correcting said libretto would she send it to Liszt. As Trippett notes in his preface, such an arrangement "meant that Liszt was heavily reliant on Belgiojoso, and trusted her literary acumen, content in the knowledge that an Italian libretto would emerge under authority" (p. xii).

Only after great effort, which Trippett wonderfully details via extant correspondence and reasonably extrapolates when it is lacking, did a libretto emerge. (Readers eager for a fuller account of *Sardanapalo*'s development should consult Trippett's "An Uncrossable Rubicon: Liszt's *Sardanapalo* Revisited," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 143, no. 2 (2018): 361–432, to which the *NLE* edition's preface is heavily indebted.) In hindsight, the libretto's appearance marked the beginning of the end for *Sardanapalo*. Liszt had been born into a German-speaking family, but was far more comfortable speaking and writing in French. Despite long stints in Italy in the late 1830s he did not have the capacity—or at least the confidence—to set versified Italian text, especially an entire opera's worth. There is also the matter of timing. Had Liszt received a complete libretto around 1846, as originally planned, it is possible that he would have completed the work. However, Liszt received the fully versified libretto in late summer 1848; composition may have begun around that time, but evidence of composition comes only in 1850. This two-year period coincided with Liszt's embrace of the music and ideas of Richard Wagner, which reinforced Liszt's longstanding unease about the dramatic integrity of Belgiojoso's *Sardanapalo*. Trippett posits that Liszt abandoned the opera on these grounds, "with concern for what he saw as the weaknesses of contemporary Franco-Italian opera in mind" (p. xv).

When the *NLE* began releasing volumes in the late 1960s, it sought to present the “Fassung letzter Hand.” In the case of published compositions like the Hungarian Rhapsodies or the Sonata in B Minor, editors understandably prioritized the final version of a piece as published in an edition directly overseen by, or at least closely connected to, Liszt. Yet many of Liszt’s compositions do not exist in a single “Fassung”—even the “Hungarian” Rhapsodies have antecedents that Liszt ushered into print. Moreover, Liszt’s manuscripts are often goldmines for first, second, and even third ideas that never saw the publishing light of day, the most famous arguably being the original, bombastic ending to the Sonata in B Minor that Liszt struck through in the holograph. There even exist prints of Liszt’s music that include autograph revisions that never made their way into the hands of contemporary publishers.

As a result of growing pressure to present Liszt in all his compositional untidiness, the *NLE* developed new editorial policies to accommodate these various “ Fassungen.” Different versions of Liszt’s opera fantasies or Schubert arrangements began to appear in the critical edition, albeit often as appendices to the ostensible “final” version. The supplements to Series I and II that began to appear under the general editorship of Adrienne Kaczmarczyk and Imre Mező in 2005 signaled an even broader understanding of the Lisztian work. Some of these volumes presented critical renderings of first versions of the “Paganini” Etudes (vol. 12) or selected Beethoven symphony arrangements (vol. 11), that is, works that Liszt explicitly retracted upon the appearance of revised versions. Such volumes not only offered insight into Liszt the composer around 1840, but—and arguably more importantly—Liszt the virtuoso at the height of his powers. Other supplemental volumes, however, such

as those connected to the *Années de pèlerinage* (vols. 5, 13, and 14) or the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* (vol. 6) were decidedly reconstructive, as they usually drew on a manuscript served as Liszt’s composing score. For these volumes, editorial sobriety and artistic creativity went hand in hand.

Sardanapalo offers a fantastic test of the viability and resiliency of the *NLE*’s current editorial policies. For his edition, Trippett had only a single source at his disposal: a manuscript colloquially known among Liszt scholars as N4, which belongs to a set of nine sketchbooks housed in Weimar’s Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv that primarily document Liszt’s compositional efforts from 1842 to 1866. Designating these manuscripts as sketchbooks has naturally predisposed researchers to understand their contents as incipient or intermediary. N4 seems to reinforce this perception, as, along with *Sardanapalo*, it contains draft material for Liszt’s two symphonies, two of his symphonic poems, his Requiem, and some miscellaneous material not directly related to specific compositions. The 115 pages of material for *Sardanapalo* take up about half the sketchbook and are distinct from these other compositional projects.

Yet as Trippett explains in “The Character of the Musical Source” (pp. 121–25), *Sardanapalo* as transmitted in N4 is not as sketchy as long believed. It preserves an almost complete set of vocal lines, including ornaments and cadenzas, and many of the main themes and other foundational material are significantly developed. Indeed, editorial reconstruction largely concerns the accompaniment. Liszt clearly envisioned the work as a grand opera, replete with all the sounds that a modern orchestra could offer. Thus, he drafted *Sardanapalo* as a short score, with important musical ideas, instrumental cues, and metric and tempo changes clearly

identified. However, copious skeletal passages, various forms of shorthand, absent or inconsistent accidentals, and occasional gaps in the music also attest to N4's "sketchbook" status, as do the many alternative passages that Liszt dreamed up.

Purveyors of recent supplemental volumes to series I and II of the *NLE* will not be shocked by the results of Trippett's edition, which "remains critical in spirit, even as its single source demands an uncommon degree of editorial interpretation" (p. 121). Everything in N4 has been kept intact, including earlier versions of passages Liszt clearly discarded, alternative passages that Liszt specifically designated ("ossia"), and alternative passages not specifically labeled by Liszt as such ("[ossia]"). Fortunately, Trippett supplies any outstanding clefs, key signatures, time signatures, accidentals, and performance directions (including character roles) needed to run through the work. Depending on context, these components are provided with or without brackets. The edition features frequent passages that employ cue-sized notes, which Trippett generates according to the following principles: "Any editorially supplied music of three or more consecutive notes that is not written down or signaled for repetition in [N4] is given in small noteheads. Editorially supplied music of fewer than three consecutive notes is given in square brackets, for visibility" (p. 119). Only a handful of editorial notes appear in the main body.

Despite the superabundance of information that Trippett's score provides, most readers should have no trouble orienting themselves to the volume's layout. That said, clarity of presentation does not necessarily translate into playability. As a short score destined for orchestration, this situation should not come as a surprise; but it does mean that pianists and singers will have to

make numerous choices about what reading to select, what version to keep, and what textures to reduce if they wish to move *Sardanapalo* beyond the realm of one's inner ear. Arguably the best sections for extraction—due to their general completeness and relatively manageable piano textures—are Mirra's set piece in scene 2, "Alla mia patria ingrata" (pp. 30–45), and the love duet with Sardanapalo that follows ("Parla! parla!" pp. 46–68). Both scenes not only give the singers a major vocal workout, but also showcase some of Liszt's most advanced experiments in harmony and thematic development.

A first for the *NLE* is the inclusion of a libretto (in Italian, English, German, and Hungarian translations; pp. 108–17), which demands its own critical apparatus. As Marco Beghelli explains in "The Reconstruction of the Libretto" (pp. 126–30), no copy of the libretto remains; it exists only in N4 as given by Liszt under the vocal lines. Therefore, the task of Beghelli and his collaborators, Francesca Vella and David Rosen, was to fashion a stylistically sound, syntactically correct libretto from a composer who often made transcription mistakes, whether due to unfamiliarity, misunderstanding, or error. Complicating the situation is that Liszt occasionally made conscious alterations to the poetic text he received from his anonymous Italian poet, who, as Beghelli admits, did not help the composer by occasionally lapsing into "old-fashioned language" (p. 129). Thus, Beghelli settles on "providing words to complete the metrical pattern of the verse and syllables for the singers to support the sung melody" (p. 130). The resulting 191-line libretto smooths over most of Liszt's infelicities, with any editorial additions made according to a careful consideration of "metric regularity, rhyme scheme, and contextual meaning" (p. 127). Beghelli recognizes that the results are not always ideal, which

accounts for some complicated editorial maneuvering on Trippett's part:

Where the libretto in [N4] contains clear misaccentuation of an Italian word, or a word that does not fit the given musical rhythm, the editors have sought to modify the form of the word to ameliorate the misaccentuation. . . . Where this is not possible, the editors correct the misaccentuation musically if this is achievable with minimal and purely rhythmic alteration to the vocal lines given in [N4]. Any such altered music is placed in square brackets and the details are noted in the critical notes. This approach constitutes by far the majority of cases. Where this is not possible without invasive editorial change to the music, misaccentuation has been left [intact] (p. 119).

Given the extant source of *Sardanapalo*, Trippett's editorial solutions are extremely reasonable. The resulting edition is highly commendable, a credit to the *NLE*'s commitment to its namesake and an exciting model for future volumes. Yet it is worth noting that the *NLE* volume also exists within a larger ecosystem. Alongside his research article mentioned earlier, Trippett has also orchestrated the entire first act, which Schott published in 2018 and Kirill Karabits premiered at Weimar on 19 August 2018. Karabits also led the Staatskapelle Weimar, Joyce El-Khoury (Mirra), Aíram Hernández (Sardanapalo), and Oleksandr Pushniak (Belenso) in a recording of this version of *Sardanapalo* for the Audite label. Despite Trippett's able hand bringing these various media to life within a matter of months, they are not homogeneous. Schott's edition runs 1,275 measures, for instance, while the *NLE* breaks off—like N4—at m. 1,257. The

recording designates the beginning of scene 2 at m. 277, the *NLE* at m. 295, and the Schott edition at m. 297. In his preface to the Schott edition, dated "Winter 2018," Trippett concluded that Liszt broke off work on the opera "probably because he never received a revised version of the libretto for acts 2–3, causing the project to stall fatally" (see p. 6 of the perusal score at <https://en.schott-music.com/shop/pdfviewer/index/readfile/?idx=Mzk4MDYx&idy=398061>). As already noted, in his *NLE* preface, dated August 2019, Trippett cites Liszt's changing aesthetics.

Indeed, such differences not only reflect the many ways that one might experience *Sardanapalo*, but also Trippett's developing understanding of Liszt's only mature, albeit incomplete opera as a means to realize compositional potential. In this regard, the final new tenant in the *Sardanapalo* ecosystem is N4, which has been available as a set of high-resolution images on website of the Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv since 2019. (The link that Trippett provides to this source in his *NLE* edition on p. 121, n. 2 has been superseded by https://ores.klassik-stiftung.de/ords/f?p=401:2:::P2_ID:198863.) For a short amount of time, then, *Sardanapalo* was the talk of the town, making appearances in the academy, the classical music world, and even media consumed by the general public. Liszt, who long held out hope that *Sardanapalo* would be his ticket to compositional immortality, would probably have been gratified.

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