

FIVE PIECES ON POEMS OF RICHARD POHL, OP. 15

Hans von Bülow (1830–1894)

Richard Pohl (1826–1896)

Hans von Bülow was one of the 19th-century's foremost musicians. As a teenager, he became a piano pupil of Liszt, who said that Bülow was "one of the greatest musical phenomena he had encountered." Bülow's most lasting musical contribution, however, was as a conductor; he insisted on the highest performance standards and was the first to conduct from memory. Bülow supported the music of Liszt and Wagner, as well as that of both Brahms and Tchaikovsky. He gave the premiere of Brahms' *Fourth Symphony* with his own Meiningen orchestra in 1885, and played the piano for the U.S. premiere of the Tchaikovsky *First Piano Concerto* in Boston in 1875, a stormy affair marred by jeers, heckling and insults.

From 1878 to 1880 Bülow was Hofkapellmeister in Hanover, but was forced to leave after fighting with a tenor singing the "Knight of the Swan" role in *Lohengrin* (von Bülow had called him the "Knight of the Swine"). In 1880 he moved to Meiningen where he took the equivalent post, and where he built the orchestra into one of the finest in Germany; among his other demands, he insisted all the musicians learn to play their parts



FIGURE 2. RICHARD POHL IN 1870

from memory. Bülow premiered many of the 19th century's most important works, such as Wagner's *Tristan und*



FIGURE 1. HANS VON BÜLOW IN 1866

Isolde and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Bülow was a powerful advocate of Liszt and his music and never wavered in his devotion to him.

Richard Pohl was another of Liszt's devotees, a tireless champion of the New German School in general and of Liszt's music in particular. He was an unabashed apologist for Liszt and wrote prolifically for most of the 19th century's most important musical periodicals. Pohl and Bülow were part of Liszt's inner circle and each undoubtedly became acquainted with the other's genius during those years.

In 1854 Pohl moved to Weimar, where he became an editor at the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. He wrote invective-laden articles under the pseudonym "Hoplit" (from the Greek term *hoplite*, the foot-soldier of ancient Greece) in support of Liszt and Wagner, and critical of music of the more conservative Romantic composers.¹

Although hardly remembered as a composer, Bülow wrote many demanding piano pieces. These five choral pieces are unknown, however, even though they are excellent examples of the High Romantic style. Bülow set Pohl's poems in 1861/2 while he was living and teach-

¹ While both Liszt and Wagner thanked him for his support, Wagner in particular cooled to Pohl in later years, especially after Pohl's assertion that Wagner borrowed his chromatic harmonies in *Tristan und Isolde* directly from Liszt.

ing in Berlin. Initially he set only the two, as the manuscript title page indicates; the remaining three poems were set the next year; the set of five were later published by C.F. Kahnt of Leipzig in 1867.²

His harmonic language, while not approaching the extreme chromaticism of Wagner or Liszt, is nevertheless innovative. One of the most notable feature of these works, however, is Bülow's use of mixed meters in "Der Wanderziel."

Pohl's texts typify the Romantic aesthetic: the Artist as outsider; a preoccupation with nature; intensely self-conscious; a tendency towards melancholy; a fascination with and a romanticized view of death—all imbued with deeply felt (occasionally maudlin) emotional expression. Attuned to Pohl's textual accents and use of heightened language, Bülow interchanges duple and triple meters to great effect at a time when composers were conservative in their use of meter even as they were stretching tonality to its limits.

² I rediscovered these pieces while working in the State Archive in Leipzig, happening upon Bülow's manuscript in the Kahnt archive. After an arduous worldwide search, I discovered two copies of the published works and obtained one for use in preparing a new edition of the five songs, which is premiered here tonight. It is likely that these Bülow's pieces have never been performed in North America.

FÜNF GEDICHTE VON RICHARD POHL, OP. 15

I. Am Strande

Die Wellen flüstern und rauschen,
und murmeln ihr altes Lied;
dem düsteren Klange sie lauschen,
der bang die Lüfte durchzieht,
Woher? weiss Keiner zu sagen;
Wohin? Nur fort!
Die fliehenden Winde,
sie tragen das Lied von Ort zu Ort:
"Wir Alle treiben zum Meere,
weiss Niemand, wohin er geht;
ob jemals er wiederkehre,
ob Welle und Wind ihn verweht?"

II. Regenbogen

Sängerliebe kommt gezogen,
wie ein lichter Regenbogen durch des Lebens Wolkengrau.
Sonne muss sie mild bescheinen,
dass sich ihre Thränen einen zu dem lichten Wunderbau.
Wenn Gewitterstürme schweigen,
siehst das Zauberbild du steigen in der Farben Harmonie.
Suche nimmer es zu fassen:
mit der Sonne wird's erbllassen,
und es schwand, du weisst nicht, wie?

III. Wanderziel

Halt: Wo hinaus?
Fort aus dem Vaterhaus,
das mir zu still und schmal;
Fort in der Welt Gebräus,
ringend in Lust und Qual!
Sprich: Wo hinan?
Immer nur himmelau streb'
ich aus engem Kreis,
wenn ich's erreichen kann,
kühn nach dem höchsten Preis!
Doch: Wo hinab?
Weiter, zum fernen Grab!
Will dort, nach all' dem Leid
ruhen am Wanderstab;
Träumen von schön'r Zeit!

IV. Ewige Sehnsucht

Der Lenz zieht ein durch festlich grüne Bogen,
kehrt wohl mit ihm der Friede bei uns ein?
Hält uns der Frühling, was der Herbst versprochen,
darf sich das Herz der jungen Blüthen freun?
Warum muss ruhlos aus der Geist bewegen?
Woher das Drängen in der Menschenbrust?
die ewig nur der Zukunft schlägt entgegen:
der Gegenwart so selten froh bewusst?

I. At the Beach

The waves whisper and roar
and murmur their old song;
they listen to the gloomy sound
that anxiously passes through the air,
From where? Nobody knows to say;
To where? Only away!
The fleeing winds
carry the song from place to place:
"We all float to the sea;
does anybody know where he is going—
if he will ever return or
if wave and wind will blow him away?"

II. Rainbow

Singer's love comes on its way
like a light rainbow through the cloudy gray of life.
The sun has to shine on it mildly
so its tears may unite it to the light, miracle structure.
When thunderstorms are silent
you will see the magic image rising in the color's harmony.
Never search to capture it:
with the sun it will fade
and disappear, do you not know how?

III. Travel Destination

Stop: To where?
Away from the paternal house,
too still and narrow for me;
away in the rush of the world,
struggling in lust and pain!
Talk: Up to where?
I always only aim from a narrow circle
towards the sky;
if I can reach it,
boldly seeking the highest prize.
Yet: Down to where?
Further, to the far grave!
I want to go there after all the sorrows
rest on the walking stick;
dreaming of a more beautiful time

IV. Eternal Longing

Spring is approaching through festive green boughs,
will we encounter peace with its coming?
Does spring keep what autumn promised?
May the heart of the young flowers rejoice?
Why must the mind move us restlessly?
From where the craving in mankind's breast?
It only ever longs for the future
And rarely is conscious of the present's joy.

Warum? Du magst darum des Waldes Sänger fragen,
die jetzt der Frühling uns zurückgebracht,
was sie denn treibt in rauhan Herbstestagen nach Süden,
wo ein schön'er Himmel lacht?
Was sie treibt nach dem Süd?
Die Sehnsucht ist's nach einem ew'gen Lenze,
der Glaube ist's an ungetrübtes Glück!
Wenn dort im Süd verwelkt des Lebens Kränze,
trägt sie die Hoffnung nach dem Nord zurück,
der Glaube an ein ungetrübtes Glück!

V. Seelentrost

Gräm' dich nur nicht so viel und bleibe fromm und still,
dann hilft der Himmel dir zu deinem besten Ziel;
glaub', jedes Herzeleid währt keine Ewigkeit,
das sei dein Liebestrost in aller trüben Zeit.
Hat Mancher mehr vollbracht, als er wohl selbst gedacht,
weil Gottes Hand ihn führte in der tiefsten Nacht:
So zag' auch du nicht mehr, blick' auf zum Sternenheer,
und in die weite schöne Welt rings um dich her!

Why? You may therefore ask the singers of the forest,
who are now returned to us by the Spring,
what is driving them to the south on raw Autumn days,
where a more beautiful sky shines brightly?

What drives them to the south?

It is the longing for an eternal spring;
it is the belief in an unspoiled happiness!
When the garlands of life wither there in the south,
hope carries them back to the north:
the belief in an unspoiled happiness!

V. Consolation of the Soul

Do not grieve so much and remain humble and still
and heaven will help you to your best end;
believe—every heartache does not last an eternity,
this is your consolation of love in all gloomy times.
One may have accomplished more than he has thought himself,
because God's hand guided him in the darkest night:
so do not hesitate anymore, look up to the army of stars,
and to the wide beautiful world around you.

THE BELLS OF THE STRASBOURG CATHEDRAL

Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882)

One of Liszt's most ingenious and compelling works is also one his least known. *The Bells of the Strasbourg Cathedral* is based on two of Longfellow's poems. The first is *Excelsior!*, about a young man carrying a banner with the word "Excelsior!" through the Alps, where after valiant struggles he freezes to death.³

The second poem was "The Spire of the Strasburg Cathedral," Part II of "The Golden Legend," from Longfellow's epic *Christus: A Mystery*. Longfellow based "The Spire" on a Medieval tale that recounts Lucifer's attempt to destroy the famous belltower of the Cathedral of Our Lady in Strasbourg, France.

The poem is a melodrama with three main characters: Lucifer, sung by the baritone soloist, who besieges first the cathedral's bells, then the crypt and altars; the Powers of the Air, sung by the sopranos, altos, and tenors; and, finally, the bells themselves, sung by the basses. Liszt tagged on a short Latin hymn at the end of Longfellow's poem, which is sung by the full choir and meant to portray the victorious angels. Each time the consecrated bells sing, Lucifer, humiliated and prostrate, is forced to withdraw.

Longfellow knew of Liszt's music as early as 1840, hearing various of his piano works in the salons of New England friends. Longfellow made his final voyage to Europe in 1868, by which time he was something of a national hero. Many of his poems formed the chief poetic diet of thousands of Americans and he was renowned as a distinguished scholar and remarkable linguist. Indeed, he made the first English translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the United States.

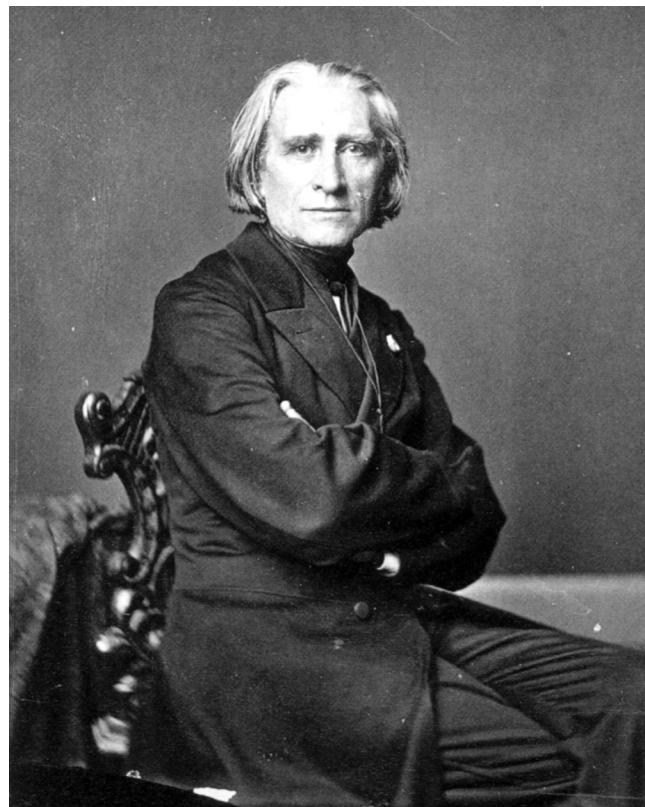


FIGURE 3. FRANZ LISZT IN 1867

George Peter Alexander Healy (1813–1894), a widely known American painter living in Rome, had made a portrait of Liszt; Longfellow saw and admired it and asked his friend Healy if a meeting with Liszt might be arranged. Healy complied by inviting Liszt to dinner; Healy and Longfellow also visited Liszt in his monastic quarters in the monastery of the Madonna del Rosario on the outskirts of Rome. An elaborate dinner party was arranged, which was attended by some of Rome's most

³ "Excelsior!" the motto of the State of New York, literally means upward and onward. It was one of Longfellow's most celebrated poems and was for decades memorized by school children in the United States.

EXAMPLE 1 . LATIN HYMN “TE DEUM” SHOWING THE THREE NOTES THAT LISZT USED FOR THE THEMATIC MATERIAL IN “EXCELSIOR!” AND “THE BELLS.” IT IS ALSO THE MELODY THAT THE BELLS SING TO VANQUISH LUCIFER.

Lau - do De - um ve - rum, ple-bum vo - co, con - gre - go cle - rum;

notable personalities. As was often his custom, Liszt played the piano for the guests to great acclaim. Liszt eventually took Longfellow to meet his longtime companion Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein at her dwelling near the Santa Francesca Romana. It was Carolyne, in fact, who first suggested to Liszt that he set the Prologue to *The Golden Legend*. She presented Liszt with a German translation of *The Bells* on Christmas day 1873. After continued prodding by Carolyne, Liszt finished the prelude (based on *Excelsior!*) and *The Bells* in

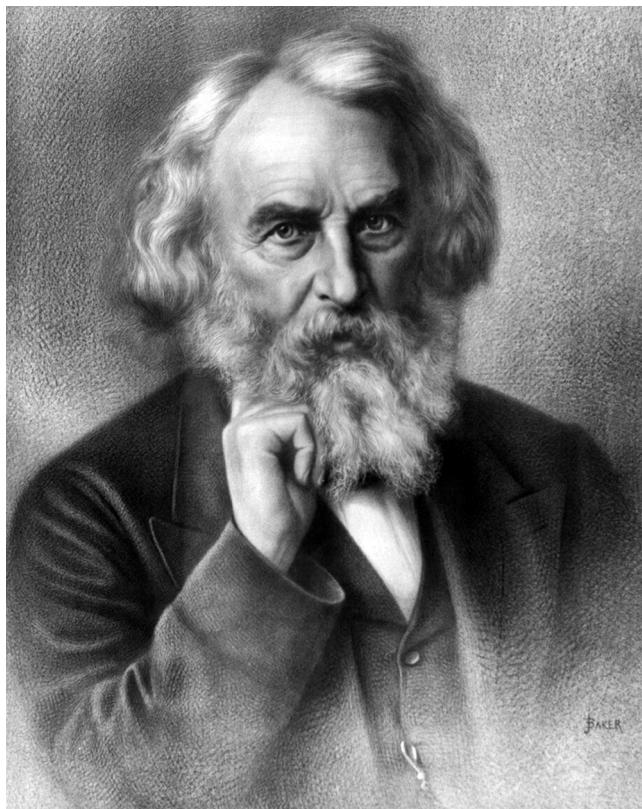


FIGURE 4. HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW IN 1875

January 1874 while spending the winter in Budapest. It was subsequently published by Liszt's longtime publisher, J. Schuberth & Co. in Leipzig. The manuscript, which is in the hand of a copyist and contains emendations by Liszt, is held in the Liszt Museum in Weimar.

EXAMPLE 4 . LISZT’S RHYTHMICALLY AGGRESSIVE LUCIFER THEME. NOTICE THE SIMILAR MELODIC CONTOUR TO THE “TE DEUM” CHANT

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A master of thematic transformation, Liszt frequently took a fragment of plainchant and from the short motive would derive an entire work. Liszt chose four notes (Ex. 1) from the Latin hymn “Te deum” as the basis of both the “Excelsior!” and “The Bells.” Example 2 shows the chant on which the hymn is based.

EXAMPLE 2 . “TE DEUM” PLAINCHANT

Te De - um lau - da - mus,

From these three pitches, Liszt creates the opening melody of “Excelsior!” (Ex. 3) He then takes that melody and fashions from it the entire prelude, which is grandiose and matches well the upward striving of Longfellow’s young hero in “Excelsior!” A contemplative middle section sung by the mezzo-soprano soloist is bracketed by powerful orchestral and choral musical exclamations. Liszt scored “Excelsior!” for both SATB and TTBB chorus, and even advised the conductor that the entire prelude could be performed by the orchestra alone.

EXAMPLE 3. OPENING MELODY OF “EXCELSIOR!” BASED ON THE TE DEUM

Liszt closely follows the extreme emotional contrasts of Longfellow’s poem, demonstrating remarkable skill in declaiming the English text, which he barely understood. Although he never wrote a mature opera, Liszt did write operatic music; “The Bells” displays his considerable dramatic abilities as it successfully captures the unsettled, terrifying mood of Longfellow’s poem. It is rhythmically complex, harmonically advanced, with a clear, concise structure, and deserves many more performances than it has had since it was first performed in 1875.

THE SPIRE OF THE STRASBOURG CATHEDRAL

Night and storm.

Lucifer, with the Powers of the Air, trying to tear down the Cross.

Lucifer

Hasten! hasten!
O ye spirits!
From its station drag the ponderous
Cross of iron, that to mock us
Is uplifted high in air!

Voices

Oh, we cannot!
For around it
All the Saints and Guardian Angels
Throng in legions to protect it;
They defeat us everywhere!

The Bells

Laudo Deum verum!	<i>I praise the true God!</i>
Plebem voco!	<i>I call on the people!</i>
Congrego clerum!	<i>I unite the clergy!</i>

Lucifer

Lower! lower!
Hover downward!
Seize the loud, vociferous bells, and
Clashing, clanging to the pavement,
Hurl them from their windy tower.

Voices

All thy thunders
Here are harmless!
For these bells have been anointed,
And baptized with holy water!
They defy our utmost power.

The Bells

Defunctos ploro!	<i>I grieve for those who are dead!</i>
Pestem fugo!	<i>I flee the plague!</i>
Festa decoro!	<i>I adorn the festivals!</i>

Lucifer

Shake the casements!
Break the painted
Panes, that flame with gold and crimson;
Scatter them like leaves of Autumn,
Swept away before the blast!

Voices

Oh, we cannot!
The Archangel
Michael flames from every window,
With the sword of fire that drove us
Headlong, out of heaven, aghast!

The Bells

Funera plango!	<i>I lament the funerals!</i>
Fulgura frango!	<i>I vanquish the thunderbolts!</i>
Sabbata pango!	<i>I establish the Sabbaths!</i>

Lucifer

Aim your lightnings
At the oaken,
Massive, iron-studded portals!
Sack the house of God, and scatter
Wide the ashes of the dead!

Voices

Oh, we cannot!
The Apostles
And the Martyrs, wrapped in mantles,
Stand as warders at the entrance,
Stand as sentinels o'erhead!

The Bells

Excito lentos!	<i>I arouse the lazy!</i>
Dissipo ventos!	<i>I disperse the winds!</i>
Paco cruentos!	<i>I control the bloodthirsty!</i>

Lucifer

Baffled! baffled!
Inefficient,
Craven spirits! leave this labor
Unto time, the great Destroyer!
Come away, ere night is gone!

Voices

Onward! onward!
With the night-wind,
Over field and farm and forest,
Lonely homestead, darksome hamlet,
Blighting all we breathe upon!

They sweep away.

Choir

Nocte surgentes	<i>Through the darkening night</i>
Vigilemus omnes!	<i>We all remain on guard!</i>