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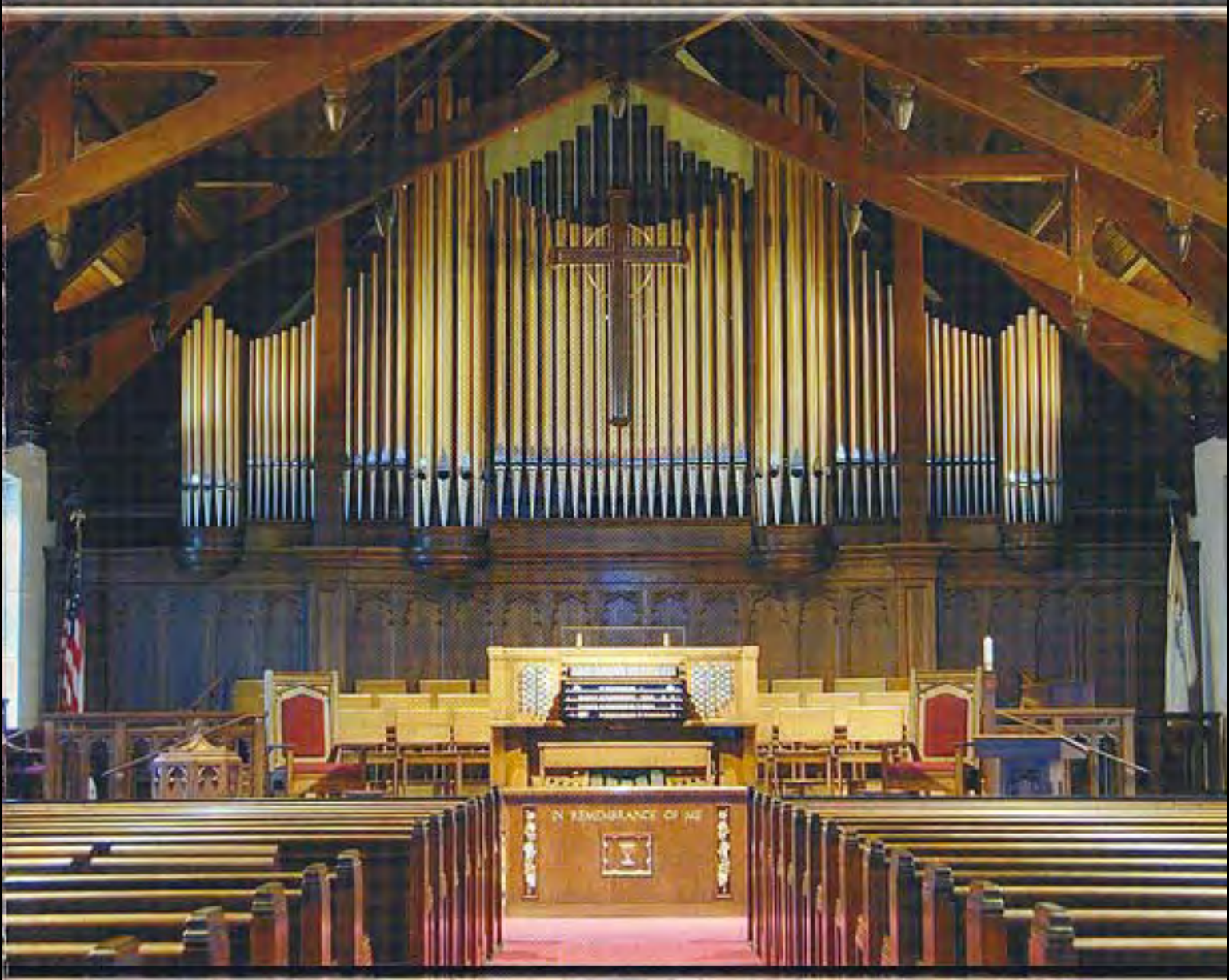


Franz Liszt conducting one of his oratorios.

LISZT'S MUSIC FOR THE "POPE AMONG INSTRUMENTS"

David Friddle

Before 1900 North German organs were designed to accommodate formal structures: fugues, chorale preludes, the five-part toccata, partitas, and sonatas. Liszt envisioned a new kind of organ, one that was focused more on expressivity and tonal color than on strict forms. In a letter to Carolyn Sayn-Wittengenstein about Via crucis, Liszt confirmed this view.

> All orchestral instruments will be done away with—and I shall merely retain an organ accompaniment ad libitum, in order to support and strengthen the voices. It is the only instrument with a right to permanence in church music—and by means of the variety of its registrations, a little more color could even be added.[1]

Liszt's influence on the evolution of the organ as a concert instrument can hardly be overstated; indeed, he was primarily responsible for moving the organ from the church into the concert hall.[2] Organists César Franck and Camille Saint-Saëns, both of whom became identified with the French symphonic tradition, knew and admired Liszt. Franck first met him in Belgium in 1842; Liszt later visited Franck at Sainte Clotilde in Paris and supported Franck by subscribing to the first edition of Franck's *Trois Trios Concertantes*, Opus 1. He also gave three concerts to promote Franck's music, in collaboration with Theodore DuBois.

Franck has traditionally been credited with composing the first organ "symphony"—the Grand pièce symphonique, Opus 17. Ad nos, however, predates the Grand pièce by more than ten years. In his organ music, Franck never equaled Liszt's success with multi-movement forms; unlike Liszt, he was not so adventurous with his registrations. Franck was known primarily as a pianist in his lifetime and his organ music is often pianistic; again, unlike Liszt, he never managed to transcend the differences between piano technique—which concentrates solely on the attack—and organ technique—which is concerned only with the release.

Liszt was impressed with the organ music of Saint-Saëns. In an 1877 letter to Olga von Meyendorff, Liszt wrote of Saint-Saëns, "I know no one among contemporary artists who, all things considered, is his equal in talent…[and] being an organist…Saint-Saëns is not merely in the first rank but incomparable."[3] Later, in an 1882 letter to Saint-Saëns, Liszt wrote,

> I am still quite struck with wonder at your *Predication aux oiseaux* [Saint-Saëns' transcription of Liszt's first legend]. You use your organ as an orchestra in an incredible way, as only a great composer and a great performer like you could do. The most proficient organist in all countries have only to take their hats off to you.[4]

Frederick Dorian believes that the Neo-German school, reflecting Liszt's ideology, is "…actually based on a French foundation." If so, then one of Liszt's favorite pupils, the virtuoso performer Julius Reubke, furthered Liszt's French influences on German organ music with his *Große Sonate für die Orgel "Der 94ste Psalm"* (1857). This powerful Romantic war-horse typifies the increasingly prevalent—and mostly French—conception of the organ as a "one-man orchestra;" it also greatly influenced subsequent composers such as Max Reger, perhaps the most important German composer for the organ.

Reger played Liszt's organ works and was deeply influenced by his symphonic poems, followed the lead of Liszt and Reubke and brought the 19th-century German organ style to its fruition. His many preludes and fugues, chorale settings, and especially the giant fantasies on Lutheran hymns are among the most ambitious and difficult pieces in the repertory. Reger, in turn, influenced on the music of Paul Hindemith, including his two organ sonatas, both of which contain fugues, and Hugo Distler, whose many chorale treatments amount to an encyclopedia of imaginative registrations.

In France, Franck, Saint-Säens, and a later generation of pupils—Charles Marie Widor, Louis Vierne, Marcel Dupré and Maurice Duruflé—took Liszt's innovations in multiple movement forms to their zenith; some of the largest organ symphonies have as many as six movements and last longer than an hour. They exploited the blossoming musical "impressionism" of Claude Debussy, Gabriel Fauré, and Maurice Ravel, and composed character pieces that successfully emulating Liszt's ability to create an almost limitless variety of aural colors.

Typically German, Reubke and Reger built on Liszt's expansive use of contrapuntal writing and created demanding symphonic fugues as part of their large-scale forms. Martin Haselböck, who edited the complete organ works for Universal, agrees with the premise that Liszt laid the musical foundation for modern organ composition and performance: "The roots of César Franck's French symphonic style, as well as of Max Reger's symphonic polyphony, can be traced directly to Liszt's organ works."[9]

Interpreting Liszt's organ works requires an awareness of the two distinct and contracting musical idioms in Liszt's music, the brilliant virtuosity of his youth, as demonstrated in Ad nos, and the austere, reflective style of his late years, as exhibited in, among others, *Am Grabe Richard Wagner* and *Resignazione*. It is also important to remember that Liszt's musical language remained constant throughout the two different stylistic periods. The extreme chromaticism of his late years—whole-tone scales and augmented triads—and his general move away from conventional tonality are all foreshadowed in the earlier works.

Larry Todd points out that *Ad nos*, Liszt's first organ piece and an experiment in large-scale, multi-sectional form, is founded harmonically on the interval of a tritone.[7] *Ad nos* is filled with whole-tone scales—melodically and as accompanimental figures—and is equally rich with augmented triads. The *Präludium und Fuge über den Namen B–A–C–H*, Liszt's homage to Bach and a study in chromaticism, virtually exhausts the expressive resources of the diminished-seventh chord.

As his ideas about the role of music in the liturgy evolved—primarily as a result of his indoctrination into the Cecilian movement[8]—he moved the organ from the concert hall back into the church, abandoning the bravura of his first organ works in favor of a more contemplative, spiritual milieu.

In his own music, and his interpretation of Bach's organ music, as shown in studies

> of the reports on Liszt's own Bach performances, as well as the ideas that he conveyed to others about this music, [we can see Liszt's] strong commitment to maintaining a high degree of flexibility. From our study of certain transcriptions, in addition to the writings by his students and biographers, we also learn that Liszt possessed a fairly good understanding of Bach's musical forms, stood for extremely precise articulation, possessed a fairly good notion of the

function and proper execution of certain ornaments, and displayed… an ability with the rhetorical approach to music.[9]

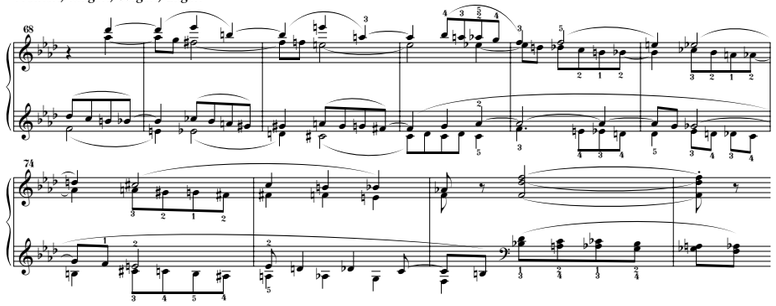
A rhetorical gesture is any compositional device employed to create an extra-musical effect. These effects can be articulation, phrasing, registrations, character indications, tempo modifiers, or recitative. As such, Liszt's organ music is filled with these rhetorical devices. Liszt's use of recitative in the organ works is one example. *Weinen, klagen, sorgen, zagen* contains an extended Recitativo that displays all the hallmarks of operatic recit while simultaneously exploring the falling chromaticism of the *Weinen, klagen* theme (Ex. 1). The effect is similar to both the literary figures Isocolon—a series of similarly structured elements having the same length, a kind of parallelism, as in *Veni, vidi, vici*, and *Conduplicatio*—the repetition of a word or words in adjacent phrases or clauses, either to amplify the thought or to express emotion, for example, Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech.[11]

The oration *Les Morts* alternates Recitativo and metered passages; poetry by Felicité Robert de Lamennais helps the performer to shape the phrases; it also characterizes the mood of the section, which is like the literary figure Epimone—the persistent repetition of the same plea in much the same words, a direct method for underscoring the pathetic appeal.[12] The texts translate as "Where are they? Who will say it? Happy are those who die in the Lord!" (Ex. 2)

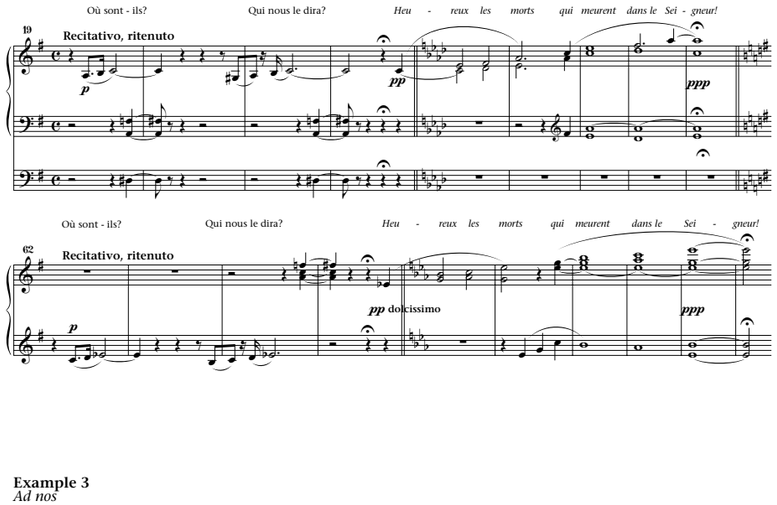
Liszt was thoughtful and creative in exploring the organ's tonal palette. He frequently gives specific instructions as to the timbre he wants for a particular passage, as noted above in Example 1, where he calls for the *Salicional* (a string stop) on the enclosed *Brustwerk* (B.W.). When Liszt uses registrations to evoke pictorial and literary images, he is engaging in *Onomatopoeia*—using language whose sound imitates that which it names, for instance the "*zz*" sound in the "buzzing of bees."[13] In one example from *Ad nos*, Liszt calls for the Tromba in order to evoke a martial atmosphere (Ex. 3).

Liszt closes *Ad nos* majestically with long, sustained chords—the idiom that is best suited to the instrument. He also reprises the trumpet figure from earlier in the work, but with the herald trumpets appropriate for triumph—not the cavalry bugles from before (Ex. 4).

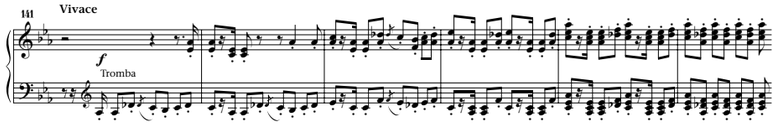
Example 7
Weinen, klagen, sorgen, zagen



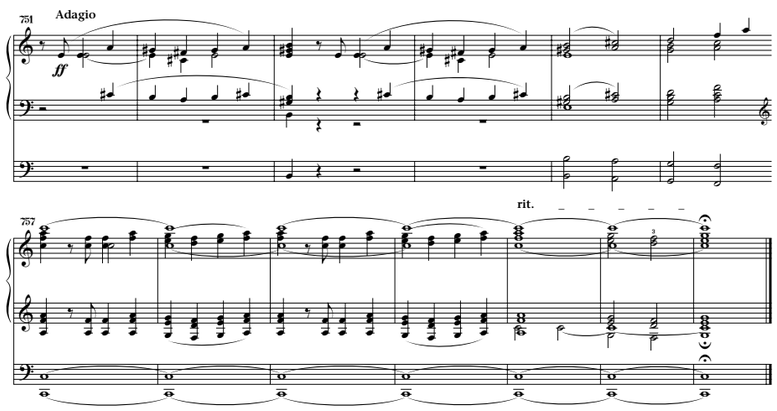
Example 2
Les Morts



Example 3
Ad nos



Example 4
Ad nos



An even more harrowing example of a figure military imagery occurs in Station VII of *Via crucis*, "Les femmes de Jérusalem." Here Liszt uses a Topographia—a vivid description of a given place;[14] in this instance Golgotha, at the arrival of the Roman guard (Ex. 5).

Evocation á la Chapelle Sixtine, composed in Rome in 1862 and dedicated to Alexander Gottschalg, aptly demonstrates Liszt's detailed registrations and his exploration of the organ's aural colors.

- m. 1 *Besondere—sehr dumpfe Register* (Special stops of dark color)
- m. 2 *Geisterhaft* (Eerie)
- m. 3 16′ und 8′ (This direction appears three more times)
- m. 27 *Viola da gamba dazu* (Add the viola da gamba)
- m. 103 *Flötenregister* (Flutes, for Liszt's transcription of Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*)
- m. 111 *Salicional*
- m. 129 *Flöte 4′ Fuss* (4′ Flute)
- m. 167 *Diese 8 Takte wo möglich poco a poco crescendo registieren* (If possible, these 8 bars should be registered as a gradual crescendo)

Liszt creates a highly unusual special effect that calls for Volles Werk (Full organ) along with a half-step tremolo in the pedal above a pedal tone. Needless to say the sound is thunderous (Ex. 6).

One of the most important aspects of the organ music are Liszt's fastidious fingerings, which articulate and phrase. The final musical result of his fingerings undermines the common belief among organists that the whole of 19th-century organ music is to be played as legato as possible, lifting fingers only for repetition of notes. This dogma is primarily French, and states that slurs are merely suggestions for phrasing and are not meant to indicate a lift. Liszt's music certainly seems to that contradict that maxim. In Example 6, even though Liszt marks the left-hand octaves legato, his fingering will produce at least a few breaks beneath the slur. Likewise, the slur attached to two staccato chords suggests phrasing instead of articulation.

The fingerings in an earlier passage of *Weinen, klagen* are highly idiosyncratic and even a little awkward for modern players, who are accustomed to finger substitution. Liszt again creates articulations with the fingerings: the constant use of the fifth finger in the uppermost voice descends precludes a

strict legato; the skip from E♮ to E♭ on the second finger creates a slight break; and the implied repeated use of the right-hand thumb in m. 75 causes each note to be articulated. Note that the fingering-based articulations are beneath slurs, which point to a phrase indication rather than a direction for legato playing. (Ex. 7)

Ad nos contains an unusual fingering that is redolent of the early Baroque, which eschewed the thumb in scales; playing the sixteenth-note passages with only the second and third fingers causes the hand to skip up the scale, rendering legato impossible. (Ex. 8)

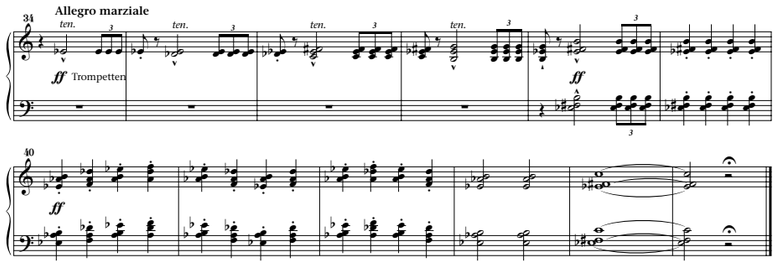
Another such example of Liszt's use of fingerings to augment articulation is found in the *B-A-C-H*, where arpeggiated diminished-seventh chords are broken into two-note groupings by way of Liszt's rather eccentric fingering (Ex. 9).

For the continuous legato style of playing espoused in the *École d'Orgue* of Jacques Lemmens (1862), teacher of Charles Marie Widor, professor of organ at the Paris Conservatoire from 1890–1896, finger substitution is essential. Indeed, the *École* is filled with elaborate finger substitution exercises; there are even examples of how to substitute on entire triads. Eventually Lemmens extends substitution to the pedals.[15] Liszt's fingerings thwart any attempt to substitute fingers; consequently, strict legato playing seems inappropriate to many passages in his organ music.

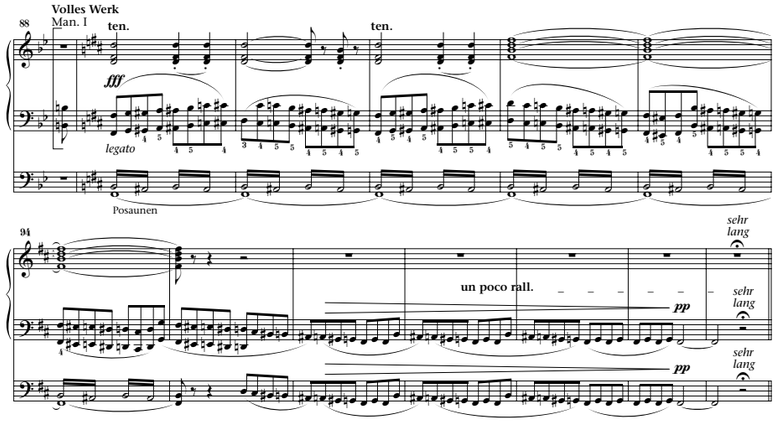
Attempting to force continuous legato playing onto Liszt's music creates serious technical problems. Much of the virtuoso passage-work is rendered either infinitely more difficult or altogether impossible. By ignoring Liszt's phrase markings one creates in the organ—an instrument not predisposed to breathing—an unnatural sustaining ability. Omitting articulations in resonant spaces muddies the music; independent polyphonic voices are lost entirely.

It has been said that all instruments are surrogates for the human voice. If this is indeed true, then performers who disregard the human need for respiration create for themselves and their audience a sense of breathlessness in the music that is artificial and un-artistic. A vocally oriented approach to Liszt's organ music does not imply that legato playing is not a part of his style; rather he uses it as a special effect. (When Liszt asks for legato, he does so almost exclusively works that include texts, such as *Salve Regina, O Sacrum Convivium* and *Weihnachtsbaum*.)

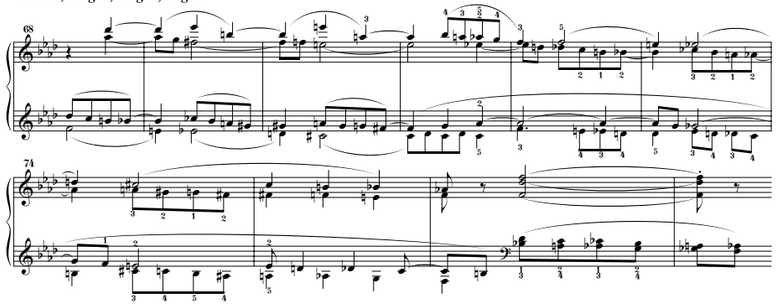
Example 5
Via Crucis, Station VII. "Les femmes de Jérusalem"



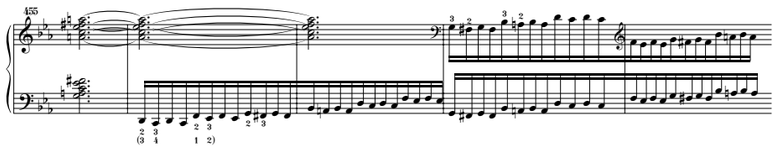
Example 6
Evocation à la chapelle Sixtine



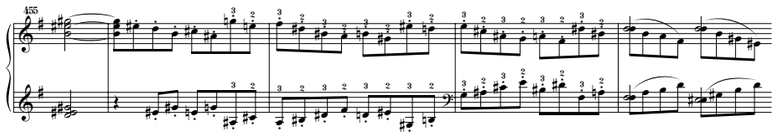
Example 7
Weinen, klagen, sorgen, zagen



Example 8
Ad nos



Example 9
Präludium und Fuge über B-A-C-H



Examination of the organ literature reveals that articulation indications such as *legato, sempre legato, legatissimo*, and *sempre legatissimo* appear only infrequently. Rarer still is the indication *legato possible* or *Alle gehalten*. These indications customarily appear outside the context of a slur and their rarity suggests that Liszt did not assume that legato playing would be normal.

Successful performance of Liszt's organ works is dependent in part on the beauty of tone color that the performer can coax from the instrument. Imaginatively chosen registrations and full use of the organ's many dynamic shades are but a part of the total effect of performance: historical investigation, technical mastery, meticulous attention to detail, and registrations that exhaust the spectrum of timbre are like pieces in a puzzle that join together to form a sum greater than its parts.

Liszt saw that the organ could be more than a machine that made birdcalls and thunderstorms. Founder of both the modern French and German schools of organ playing, his legacy is indisputable and pervasive. Liszt's students and devotees established an enduring musical tradition that owes its very existence to him. By recognizing the rich potential of the organ as an expressive medium for a vocal and orchestral idiom, he himself achieved full definition of the symphonic style that he created.

In the end, Liszt left perhaps the most sensible and direct advice interpreting his music:

> Notation, in spite of painstaking conscientiousness, can never fully suffice; although I have been trying by way of precise sketches to clarify my intentions, I do not mean to conceal the fact that certain features—and among them the most important ones—cannot be put down in writing. Thoroughgoing effects can be achieved only through sympathetic, lofty reproduction by the conductor as well as the other performers.[16]

Performers become like the assistants to great Renaissance painters who, following the outline of the master, completed his sketch and brought his master's vision to life. As we study and perform Liszt's organ music, we will do well to consider his advice; we, the performers and re-creators of his music, are

BULLETIN NOTES

Dona Nobis Pacem ("Grant Us Peace")
J.S. Bach (1685–1750)

GRANT US PEACE. Such a simple petition to God for something the world so desperately needs. Yet the reality is that peace seems beyond our hope. Amid the rumblings of war, we see intolerance and suspicion of other cultures and faiths, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and acts of terrorism and hate. Even in our own lives we deal with broken relationships, loss of loved ones, and the stress of over-scheduled lives. How can we even dare ask for peace and not be disappointed?

In this closing movement of Bach's B-minor Mass, we hear the uncertainty of such a request in a single, quiet opening bass line. But the piece grows inexorably to a brilliant sonority of all four parts that beautifully expresses the infinite hope that our petition is not in vain. Martin Luther King addresses this same question in one of his sermons. "The answer lies," he says, "in our willing acceptance of unwanted and unfortunate circumstances even as we cling to a radiant hope, our acceptance of finite disappointment even as we adhere to an infinite hope." And what is the source of this hope? Prior to its close, Bach's Mass includes the Symbolem Nicene, or Nicene Creed, that great communal statement of the Christian faith. "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty . . ." Surrounded by a thousand reasons not to place any hope in ever really knowing peace, it is our faith in God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit that allows us to still ask for it, to work towards it, and to believe that it is not only possible but the very condition for which we were created.

BOB BAILEY

obliged to summon all of our creative imagination and spontaneous inspiration to render these magnificent works with the brilliance that befits them.

NOTES

1. Paul Merrick, *Revolution and Religion in the Music of Liszt*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 90.
2. The organ first appeared as a constituent in the symphony orchestra in Liszt's *Hunnenschlacht, sym. poem after paintings by W. von Kaulbach*. In it Liszt distinguishes between the Harmonium, which was a somewhat portable reed organ, and the larger concert instrument. One cannot assume that the two are interchangeable. Saint-Säens followed Liszt's lead by incorporating the organ into his *Symphony no. 3 in c minor*.
3. Edward M. Waters, ed., *The Letters of Franz Liszt to Olga von Meyendorff, 1871–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 301.
4. Howard Bakken, "Liszt and the Organ,' in *The Diapason* (May 1969), pp. 27–29.
5. Ibid.
6. Martin Haselböck, "Liszt's Organ Works" in *The American Organist* (July 1986, vol. 20, no. 7), pp. 56–63.
7. Larry Todd, "Liszt, Fantasy and Fugue for Organ on 'Ad nos ad Salutarem undam'" in *19th Century Music* (Spring 1981, Vol. IV, No. 3), pp. 250–261.
8. A 19th-century movement, centered in Germany, for the reform of Catholic church music. Reacting to the liberalization of the Enlightenment, the Cecilians sought to restore traditional religious feeling and the authority of the church. They regarded 'true, genuine church music' as being subservient to the liturgy, and intelligibility of words and music as more important than artistic individuality. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, s.v. "Cecilian Movement" (by Siegfried Gmeinwieser), http://www.grovemusic.com/ (accessed 16 August 2004)
9. Milton Sutter, "Liszt and the Performance of Bach's Organ Music," in *Referate des 2. europäischen Liszt Symposiums, Eisenstadt 1978*, Serge Gut, ed. (Leipzig: Musikverlag Emil Katzbikhers, 1981), p. 209.
10. http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/Figures/I/isocolon.htm (Accessed 30 July 2004)
11. http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/Figures/Groupings/of%20Pathos.htm (Accessed 30 July 2004)
12. http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/Figures/Groupings/of%20Pathos.htm (Accessed 30 July 2004)
13. http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/Figures/Groupings/of%20Sound.htm (Accessed 30 July 2004)
14. http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/Figures/Groupings/of%20Place.htm (Accessed 30 July 2004)
15. Jacques Lemmens, *École d'Orgue* (Paris, 1862) as quoted in Sandra Soderlund, *Organ Technique: An Historical Approach*. (Chapel Hill: Hinshaw Music, Inc., 1980), p. 153.
16. Frederick Dorian, *The History of Music in Performance: The Art of Musical Interpretation from the Renaissance to Our Day*. (New York) W.W. Norton & Co., 1942), p. 259.

David Friddle started organ lessons at age seven and went on to obtain a Masters and Doctorate in organ from The Juilliard School. Currently David is in the third year of the DMA choral conducting program at the University of Miami, where he won the prestigious Presser Music Award. Supported by the UM Frost School of Music, Dr. Friddle has prepared a new, critical edition of *Christus* that was used in performance for the first time at the 2005 ALS Festival and will be published in 2006 by Bärenreiter.