

PART I

People and Places

CHAPTER I

*Family Background**Adrienne Kaczmarczyk*

The ancestors of Franz Liszt settled near the northwestern borderlands of the Kingdom of Hungary during the eighteenth century, which was, to most, sovereign of all countries among the Habsburg Empire. The first member of the family to appear in the parish register of Rajka (an agricultural town on the shores of the Danube) was his great-grandfather, Sebastian List (c. 1703–93). Up until the early twentieth century, almost all members of this German-speaking family lived in this region, inhabited by ethnic Germans, Magyars and Slovaks.

Sebastian's parents probably arrived in Hungary along with those hundreds of thousands of other families whose settlement was agreed on by leading Austrian and Hungarian politicians of the era. Following the century and a half (1541–1699) of Turkish occupation, and then an uprising against the Habsburg Empire by Ferenc Rákóczi II (1703–11), the population of the country had been depleted. A slow growth had started after the 1711 peace treaty of Szatmár. The 1720 census only counted a population of 3.8–4 million. The 1784 census ordered by Joseph II saw these figures double. Although the language and culture of this immigrant population of 1.2–1.3 million people was not Hungarian, these dissimilarities had not caused issues, since stratification resulted from social status and not ethnicity. Every inhabitant of the Kingdom of Hungary counted as a *Hungarus*, regardless of whether they considered themselves to be Magyar, German, Romanian, Slav or any other ethnicity. The Habsburg rules mainly sought to increase the number of German-speaking Catholics; therefore, they were settled in the greatest numbers. The List family had chosen as their destination one of the most developed regions, Pozsony, known as Pressburg.¹

Translated by Dániel Szöllösy-Nagy.

¹ Following World War I, the western part of the region was attached to Austria and became part of the newly created province of Burgenland in 1921. Areas north of the Danube were annexed to Czechoslovakia. In 1921, the city of Pressburg became the capital of Slovakia, Bratislava.

Pressburg functioned as a temporary capital between 1541 and 1790 in lieu of Buda,² which had been devastated by the Ottomans and was slowly being reconstructed. Because of Pressburg's proximity to Vienna, it was the location of a number of coronations and national assemblies up until 1848. The presence of a clerical and social elite had a beneficial effect on the cultural life of the city. The greatest patrons of music were the primates of the Catholic Church who lived in Pressburg at the time.³ They had adopted the repertoire of the Viennese *Hofkapelle*, and the orchestras played *Kunstmusik* of the time. The theatre, built in 1776 as a result of an effort by noblemen, also provided grounds for opera performances, in which during the winter sessions musicians employed by the princes Esterházy also participated. Owing to a lack of trained Hungarian musicians, both the ecclesiastical and the secular ensembles employed German, Austrian and Czech musicians. Without their presence, it would not have been possible to reorganise the art music life in multiple Hungarian cities by the early nineteenth century.⁴

By the second half of the eighteenth century, Pressburg was becoming even more attractive to intellectuals because of its high school and university. Among them were the most talented descendants of Sebastian List. While Sebastian himself was spending his days as a farm labourer, his son Georg Adam (1755–1844) took the first steps towards social ascendance. His few years of middle school education were sufficient to enable him to find employment on the estates of Nikolaus I Prince Esterházy 'The Magnificent', first as a schoolmaster, then as a cantor and a notary. Georg Adam had twenty-five children from three wives between 1775 and 1817. Only the most dedicated among them could follow their father's footsteps, as they would have to pay for their education themselves. One of them was the eldest son who lived to be an adult, Adam (1776–1827), the composer's father. Another was the youngest son Eduard (1817–79), who obtained a doctorate of legal studies and later became state prosecutor for the Austrian Supreme Court.⁵

² Unified into Budapest in 1873 from Buda, Óbuda and Pest.

³ The position of the primate was filled by the archbishop of Esztergom. In 1543, his seat was evacuated to Nagyszombat (Trnava today) and was only returned to Esztergom in 1820.

⁴ Take the example of Győr, the nearby bishopric. Its cathedral had as its conductor from 1761 Benedek Istvánffy (1733–78), the most talented Hungarian composer of his era. The sheet music repository proves that he had close links with Esterházy's musicians and may have also been a student of their conductor, Georg Werner. Ferenc Erkel was one of Istvánffy's descendants.

⁵ Liszt was only in touch with Eduard from among the members of his wider family. He trusted Eduard to manage his financial investments and passed his nobility title to Eduard in 1867, which knighthood he had received from Emperor Franz Joseph in 1859.

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Adam Liszt presumably had a good basic education, otherwise he would not have been accepted to the Royal Catholic Gymnasium of Pressburg, where he passed his baccalaureate in 1795. The study of Latin language and literature was at the core of the five-year curriculum. Given that the official languages of the Kingdom of Hungary, dependent of the Habsburg Empire, were German or Latin until 1844, the high school prepared students for a public career and university education that was also in Latin. Classes were held in German, but Hungarian was mandatory for pupils of other mother tongues. Although Adam Liszt wrote his surname with Hungarian spelling, he failed to master the language. As a result of massive immigration to Hungary in the eighteenth–nineteenth century, however, the lack of a working knowledge of Hungarian was not unusual.

When in the Autumn of 1795 Adam Liszt took the habit at the Malacka house of the Franciscan order, he was following in the footsteps of his uncle, Father Antonius, who joined the order in 1739. Although Adam was dismissed two years later due to his inconstant temper, he still maintained a good relationship with the monks. His Franciscan piety also took root in his son, who was admitted to the order in 1858.⁶ It is not unlikely that Adam had a dual aim in becoming a novice; he could have been attracted by the possibility of learning, in addition to the life of a monk. The churches of the time bore the costs of educating people from lower classes to ensure an ample supply of clergymen and teachers for their schools. Thus, some great-grandchildren of Georg Adam Liszt obtained an intellectual's education from the church, such as Antal Vetzkó, the parson of Bedeg, and Alajos Hennig, a Jesuit priest.

After the path of the church had been closed to him, Adam Liszt entered the faculty of philosophy at the university of Pressburg in the fall of 1797 to strengthen his position among secular intellectuals. Since he also had to support his siblings, he was unable to pay for his tuition and was forced to abandon his studies after the first semester. In 1798, he was hired by the Esterházy of Forchtenau as an administrator, and then three years later he sought out the employ of Prince Nikolaus II in Eisenstadt. But then he was looking to be employed as a musician, rather than as an administrator. These steps suggest that although the key to social advancement was higher education, deep down in his heart he wanted to be a musician. When he had his portrait made, he chose to be painted as playing the piano. According to his son, his performance was not

⁶ See Chapters 18 and 19 for further discussion of Liszt's religious views.

technically perfect, but he was decidedly talented.⁷ Presumably, even Sebastian List was also attracted to music, otherwise as a farm labourer he would not have allowed his son to spend his time playing the organ, the piano and the violin. Georg Adam, although he had not become a musician, was in touch with the professionals. This is evidenced by the parish records of the Saint Martin dome in Pressburg, according to which his children, born in 1792 and 1794, were held during their baptism by Franz Xaver Bernhoffer, a member of the town's most well-known musician dynasty. Georg Adam's musical affinity was not only inherited by Adam: Eduard was an excellent piano player, whereas Alajos Hennig composed several religious choir pieces.

According to stories told to his son, Adam Liszt had nothing else to do during his four years after arriving in Eisenstadt in 1805 than playing music. He knew Haydn and Hummel, who was the *Konzertmeister* between 1804 and 1811. Adam was proud to have been able to participate as a cellist at the world premiere of Beethoven's Mass in C Major in 1807, conducted by the composer himself. His happiness was short lived, as in 1808 he was transferred to Lackenbach, and then in 1809 to Raiding (in Hungarian: Doborján) as a sheep accountant.

Adam's words should be measured with a critical approach. Being a well-trained administrator, it is unlikely that he would rather have been employed by Nikolaus II as an amateur musician. Presumably, the orchestra would have made use of him as temporary help. The fact that he was transferred to a position of responsibility in 1808 shows that his superiors were clearly aware of his accounting skills. Based on a letter sent from Paris in 1824, it does seem that the members of the orchestra acknowledged his musical gift.⁸ The familiar tone used in the letter suggests a friendship with some of them, so they presumably met to play music after 1808 as well. As evidenced by local historical research at Raiding during the 1970s and 1980s, Adam's circumstances were not as sad as he may have felt.⁹ At the farmstead where he worked stood a T-shaped residential building, around a third of which was being used in the 1810s and named as a manor house (*Edelhof*). In early 1811, Adam and Anna Maria Lager (1788–1866) began

⁷ See J. d'Ortigue, 'Études biographiques I. Frantz Listz [sic]' *Gazette musicale de Paris* 2, no. 24 (14 June 1835): 198.

⁸ See La Mara, 'Aus Franz Liszts erster Jugend', *Die Musik* 5, no. 19 (1905/1906): 15.

⁹ See H. Pickler, 'Franz Liszts Geburtsort und Geburtshaus' and W. Meyer, 'Der Meierhof in Raiding – Der Schauplatz von Liszts Kindheit', in *Franz Liszt: Eine Genie aus dem pannonischen Raum*, ed. G. Winkler (Eisenstadt, 1986), 29–46 and 47–53.

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married life in that house and on 22 October, their only child, Franz was born there.

The bond between the Liszt couple proved to be strong. Adam's stubborn nature was fortunately balanced by Anna's pliable personality. Originally from Krems in Lower Austria, her father Mathias Lager (1715–96) was a baker. In 1810, she moved to Mattersdorf to live with her brother, Franz Lager, where she met her future husband, the son of the notary. After Adam passed away in 1827 in Boulogne-sur-Mer in France, Anna moved to Paris to live with her son. Their correspondence shows a close relationship. Anna wrote 70 letters to her son between 1831 and 1865, and he sent her 121 letters between 1827 and 1866. Her grandchildren, Blandine and Cosima joined the tranquillity of her Parisian home from the end of 1839, and Daniel from the autumn of 1841. Their relationship remained close even after the children entered boarding school, as was the norm in those days. Franz Liszt paid special attention to their education, as he was dismayed throughout his own life for not having received quality education. He attended school in Raiding until the age of ten, with his father teaching him thereafter. He acquired his extensive knowledge of literature, religion and cultural history later, by reading.

According to family tradition, Franz's musical prowess was discovered at the age of six. That is when Adam noticed that the little boy was rendering a clear and precise singing of the Ries piano concerto, one of the themes of which Adam was practising. The piano lessons that shortly followed amazed the father, who then made it his mission to provide his son with a qualified teacher.¹⁰ As an accomplished performer, Hummel was unaffordable. If Adam had intended that his son follow the Kapellmeister career track he could have consulted Henrik Klein, the music teacher of Pressburg. For an average Hungarian town, Pressburg had an exceptionally rich theatrical and concert scene. The skills of this Moravian master had also resulted in retaining the presence between 1822 and 1825 of Ferenc Erkel (1810–93), the other most important Hungarian musical personality of the century beside Liszt himself, and the future creator of the Hungarian national opera.¹¹ The fact that Adam had not even considered taking Franz to Pressburg suggests that the conductor position that would go

¹⁰ His father's diary, disappeared since, had contained information on Liszt's childhood years, as reported by d'Ortigue, 'Études biographiques', 198.

¹¹ See T. Tallián, 'Ein Genie des Ertragens: Zur Zweihundertjahrfeier Ferenc Erkel's', *Studia Musicologica* 52, nos. 1–4 (2012): 15–25.

along with religious or noblemen's service had lost its attractiveness by the first decades of the nineteenth century. Young talents would rather be in Vienna, where a career path of a virtuoso promised more independence. During August 1819, Adam introduced his son to Carl Czerny, who took on educating him without any hesitation. Only after the establishment by Liszt and Erkel of the Academy of Music in 1875 was Budapest able to provide a sufficient level of musical training to talents similar to Ernő Dohnányi and Béla Bartók, who both grew up in Pressburg.

According to the Esterházy files, Adam Liszt petitioned Nikolaus II starting in July 1819 for a transfer to a Vienna office and to support his son's education. After failing to gain the support of the prince, Adam sought a different method; he hoped that his son's public performances would result in generous patrons. For his first performance, Adam had Franz perform in October 1820 at the Sopron Casino, and following its success, he organised a new concert for 26 November in Pressburg. Count Nikolaus Esterházy, a relative of the prince of Eisentsadt, hosted the event at his palace, with the attendance of many noblemen. Clad in traditional Hungarian attire, the young boy impressed the audience with his extraordinary pianistic skills. As a result, Hungarian noblemen of Antal and Tádé Amadé, Antal Szapáry, Nikolaus Esterházy and the counts Apponyi made a promise of an annual stipend of 600 forints for the duration of six years.

The largesse of the Hungarian noblemen was also influenced by the political situation. A significant, nationwide resistance blossomed in August 1822 in response to a tax increase of 250 per cent by the Viennese government, intending to pay for the costs of the Napoleonic wars. Franz I (1792–1835) was eventually forced to make concessions. In 1825, he assembled the national assembly, which made the first steps towards the abolishment of feudalism. Between 1830 and 1848 a transition programme of citizens had been formulated and executed in the spirit of liberal nationalism.¹² Many important cultural institutions were established as part of this programme, funded by pledges of hundreds of thousands of forints by the noblemen. Count Ferenc Széchenyi surpassed them all; he laid the foundation of the National Library by donating his collection of books and manuscripts. His son, István Széchenyi, offered one year of his income at the 1825 national assembly for the establishment

¹² From a foreigner's point of view, John Paget's 900-page travel guide provides the most details on the circumstances of the era: *Hungary and Transylvania; with Remarks on Their Condition, Social, Political and Economical, with numerous illustrations from sketches by Mr Hering* (London: J. Murray, 1839).

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of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Both the Academy and the National Theatre were established by public pledges following his initiative. The Esterházy family certainly had members of Hungarian sentiment, but Prince Nikolaus II was not among them. By offering 1,000 forints to the National Museum in 1811, he proved to be more avaricious than any of his peers. He spent his wealth on his famous art collection. As an aristocrat, he presumably found Adam Liszt's ambitions excessive. However, others were just as avaricious when it came to supporting private individuals. Although in the nineteenth century close to 46,000 Hungarian students had enrolled at foreign universities, most of them in Vienna or Germany, an insignificant number of them had received any scholarship.¹³ Institutions, foundations or private individuals were only willing to supply a stipend if they were certain that their support would produce an intellectual, political or financial return. As an example, in 1830 not even 200 forints were collected to support the international studies of Miklós Barabás, who painted Liszt's portrait in 1846. Adam Liszt therefore had nothing else available but to appeal to the nationalistic sentiments of the Hungarian noblemen, who might see in his son their own nation, and thus provide some support. In the end, both parties found what they had been looking for. From 1839, Liszt's first return to home, the noblemen could be certain that their investment would yield results to Hungary.

¹³ L. Szögi, 'Studentenmigration aus Ungarn 1100–1918', in *Mehrsprachigkeit in Zentraleuropa*, ed., A. F. Balogh and Ch. Leitgeb (Vienna: Praesens, 2012), 67–80.

CHAPTER 2

*Liszt's Teachers**Paul Bertagnolli*

Liszt's musical education was, in one respect, commonplace. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Habsburg Empire's gifted youngsters typically began instruction with their fathers or close relatives, who ranged in expertise from amateurs to professional court or church musicians. Exceptional talent warranted engaging recognised pedagogues or cultivating special opportunities, often in Vienna, where a conservatory that opened as a singing school in 1817 developed no instrumental curricula until 1827. This pattern governed the training of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and many contemporaries. Liszt likewise studied first with his father, Adam Liszt, in Raiding, then with Carl Czerny and Antonio Salieri in Vienna and finally with Ferdinando Paer and Antoine Reicha in Paris, all between 1817 and 1826.

Otherwise, however, Liszt's education was remarkable. Eschewing comprehensive instruction, his teachers addressed specific subjects that suited their unique qualifications, including piano technique, improvisation, score reading, orchestration, operatic composition and counterpoint. They thereby catalysed an unsystematically trained prodigy's transformation, first into an internationally celebrated touring virtuoso, then into a budding composer who lastingly espoused their aesthetics. At concerts, Liszt distributed notices that included his teachers' names, perhaps to market himself shrewdly, but also to honour his mentors. Biographers nonetheless diminished his teachers' influences, perpetuating the Romantic era's notion of the genius's endowment with natural or even divine gifts. Nevertheless, primary sources and knowledge of his teachers' pedagogy help circumscribe what they taught Liszt.

Adam Liszt (1776–1827)

Adam Liszt's musical competence incited controversy because he was an administrator for Hungary's Esterházy princes, not a professional

musician. Liszt's earliest biographer, Joseph d'Ortigue, judged Adam a 'consummate musician' who played 'almost every instrument' and possessed 'rather remarkable technical ability' as a pianist, opinions that informed later biographies.¹ As Allan Keiler argued, however, documents in the Esterházy archives establish that Adam exaggerated his modest skills as a composer, singer and player of several orchestral instruments to obtain a transfer from rural Kapuvár, where he was stationed in 1801, to urban Eisenstadt, where he performed as a supernumerary in the court orchestra on special occasions beginning in 1805.² The Esterházy's vice-Kapellmeister, Johann Fuchs, tellingly observed that Adam was 'rather musical', yet the 'true manner of making music' was 'somewhat unknown to him'. Adam thus remained a dilettante who used music to improve his material circumstances.

Scant evidence chronicles Adam's pianism and pedagogy. Although he claimed he developed pianistic interests after hearing Hummel perform in Eisenstadt, he acquired a piano only in 1810, after another transfer to provincial Raiding in 1809 deprived him of ensemble activities. Self-taught amateurs of Adam's day approached keyboard technique unsystematically, often consulting readily available eighteenth-century treatises that advocated pervasively detached articulation, *inégal* rhythmic treatment and limited arm involvement. Such widespread performance practices likely informed Czerny's unfavourable first impression of Liszt's playing, as described here. Inconsistencies riddle Adam's account of his discovery of Liszt's talent at age six, but the irregularity of lessons for three years suggests Adam was less strict than is sometimes thought. He nonetheless employed harsh methods: Liszt recalled his father slapped him for presumptuously trying to play Beethoven's *Hammerklavier Sonata*, and a Genevan woman observed Adam dispensing corporal punishment.³

Liszt progressed rapidly. As Adam's letters proclaim, Liszt capably played many works by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Clementi, Hummel and Cramer. His boast received justification when Liszt debuted in Oedenburg in November 1820, performing Ferdinand Ries's Second Piano Concerto, a taxing, thirty-minute score featuring brilliantly ornate melodies, fluid arpeggios, tremolos and scales in various parallel intervals.

¹ Joseph d'Ortigue, 'Franz Liszt: "Étude biographique"', *Gazette musicale de Paris*, 14 June 1835, p. 196; Emile Haraszti, 'Liszt à Paris', *Revue musicale* 17 (1936): 246; Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt*, vol. 1: *The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 38, 58.

² Allan Keiler, 'Liszt and Beethoven: The Creation of a Personal Myth', *19th-Century Music* 18 (1988): 119–21.

³ August Göllerich, *Franz Liszt* (Berlin: Marquardt, 1908), 159–60; Haraszti, 'Liszt à Paris', 258.