

LISZTIAN HIGHLIGHTS OF *JEUX D'EAU* BY M. RAVEL

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Abstract: *The aim of this article is to be integrated to Franz Liszt special bicentenary celebration. It consists of Liszt appraisal through Jeux d'eau by Maurice Ravel. A number of Liszt applicable piano art ways are to be shown how they could possibly help the performer to get nearer to Ravel required musical expression. Romantic Liszt piano art achievements are for the piano music of modern times a source of inspiration both for composers and performers as well. Great Liszt's personality veneration can be brought about through his wide range of influences either not just through his own original works.*

Keywords: *Franz Liszt, fine piano mastery, Maurice Ravel.*

1. Introduction

We are now close to the end of the *Liszt's* year bicentenary celebration but around the day marking the 200th birthday of *Franz Liszt*: 22th of October. Musicians, particularly pianists, throughout all over the world for a whole year worshiped his great personality in different ways: either by performing his works or writing books and articles in his honour.

Liszt's creation and creativity have been an important source of inspiration further

for the brightness, artistry or great mastery of other composers living in same period of time or later, in the XXth Century. There is a fact that some of greatest creators in music have beneficially been influenced or have found a great source of inspiration in his works.

Liszt has immensely enriched his times either as a composer, a pianist, a pedagogue or even through the human being he was. The amplitude of *Liszt's* influences crossed over his times spreading in the first half of the XX^h Century.

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Worshipping too these particular aspects of him means fully recognizing the large role he played for the development of not just the piano music but for the music as a whole.

Certainly *Liszt's* achievements in piano music are one of the most notable as '*Liszt* has set the piano art on completely new and revolutionary bases' [1]. After him piano potential sonorities have not just been much enriched but started to display all their complexity in a unique wide range.

There are quite a few, among XXth Century greatest piano composers, who have been notably influenced by the big romantic composer if we would mention just two of them: the Hungarian *Béla Bartók* or the French *Maurice Ravel*.

In this article there is the particularly attempt to appraise some of the *Liszt's* vast piano personality facets by involving the revolutionary *Ravel's* piano work, *Jeux d'eau* in a performing view. A closer approach from the performer point of view is a challenge when the aim is about describing some *Liszt* piano art principles which could particularly determine an improvement of *Ravel's* *Jeux d'eau* performing further achievements.

2. Objectives

This article is intended to be integrated to the *Liszt's* celebration ways by pointing out a number of assumed working or constructive chosen suggestions of *Liszt's* piano art. They are assumed to may work towards a possible improvement of the chosen *Ravel* piano work potential performance. There is reckoned *Ravel's*

Jeux d'eau written in 1901 as a most illustrative work: its programme title birth could be by far imagined as a later consequence of prior *Liszt's* work, *Jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este*.

Another dedicated piano composer of the XXth Century and a great admirer of *Liszt*, *Ravel* is said he was using to confront *Liszt's* works while composing for piano. Starting with this position there is believed that a certain improvement of *Ravel's* work performance way could be achieved by applying with more awareness some of great *Liszt's* piano art means.

The ambition of this article would be achieved if it would be considered a help for the possible performer in reaching out the most of *Ravel's* *Jeux d'eau* musical expression. Thus *Liszt* worship would be considered accomplished.

3. Material and Methods.

3.1. Material

A significant support in undertaking this research was the book *Ravel according to Ravel*. It contains dialogs between two great performers of *Ravel's* work who shares their comprehension: Vlado Perlemuter, the brilliant polish pianist who studied *Ravel's* piano solo music with the composer himself shares ideas together with Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, a contemporary music violinist, who after being remarked by *Ravel* she started to be his preferred performer.

As a material for the research there is used a sample of *Ravel's* published score by Dover Publications, Inc. in 1986.

3.2. Methods

In this demonstration a number of four elements regarded as belonging to *Liszt* piano art legacy will be mentioned and eventually applied to a certain extent according to the goal assumed. Even they are widely known a more aware use of them is reckoned to lead to a certain improvement of the performing skills of *Ravel* piece.

From the two main musical ideas of the piece written in a sonata form, the first one sounds more *Lisztian*. Hence the attention will be focussing more on the main theme contained in the bars 1-6. A great many of its piano solutions are considered here as representative for the whole. They work together in building further the piece to the end. However the attention will be focussing in the first bar regarded as the generator element of the whole theme.



Ex.1.Maurice Ravel. Jeux d'eau .bar 1.

Due to its features it seems that while composing *Ravel* has been extensively tilting over the following *Liszt*'s piano art characteristic:

- a. Sensual virtuosity and silky brilliance of the sound.
- b. Melodic line integrated with figurations. Thumb in charge with quasi- melodic elements.

- c. Same importance of hands level involvement.
- d. Use of the pedal as an active element of the performance.

In the direction of the four *Liszt* predicament listed above one can find at all times great *Liszt*'s most favourable solutions as optimal choices on the way to their accomplishment. A number of benefits whereas associating and applying them to *Ravel*'s music are next to be pointed out.

3.2. a. Sensual virtuosity and silky brilliance of the sound.

Main subject consists of a more harmonical environment written in broken arpeggios melodic way. Towards a performance the pianist has both ways to mind about: the harmonical alternate colour zones drawn through the melodic shape of them. Even though there is not about a melodic line a performer has to look for shaping the arpeggios in an as silky, smooth way as possible in the upper register of the keyboard.

Although the composer wanted it to be played 'not too fast but without dragging'[2] when proceeding to it performers realize at the very first line how difficult can be. From the very beginning *Jeux d'eau* reveals a definite very high level of virtuosity if not helped by piano good means.

Liszt, the biggest piano virtuoso of all times, established the piano art range problems in several levels of their difficulty. In his acceptance scales and arpeggios are situated in the top of the hardest performing difficulties [3].

However *Ravel's* manner of employing the arpeggios in building this composition puts it in a higher grade of their difficulty. The main problem is represented by their particular way: their alternate rising and descending course in semiquavers in the right hand. Even though they are required in a not very fast speed their changing course way calls for a supplied necessity of controlling them. The continuous movement up and down of arpeggios rows occurring about twice a beat, as it can be seen in the sample image, provides a discomfort more in achieving the composer desire: *Très doux* (very soft, silky, smooth). In these circumstances the *Ravel* indication seems to refer more to certain simplicity of approaching them. 'Melodic but not sentimental' [4] is another *Ravel's* recommendation. In this respect it seems simplicity of the musical expression could be extended to either its performance means.

One of the main things to be avoided consists in the fact they are 'often played quite articulated'[5]. Keeping fingers close to the keys [6] is a modern guideline of the piano art coming from *Liszt* the virtuoso. This is a suggestion designed to help the performer in getting easier *Ravel's* concern. A second *Liszt* constructive way, related to the previous is about keeping a light hand while performing them. This meets the *Ravel* requirement of being careful to avoid a dragging performance. Thus one of the secrets of accomplishing *Ravel* arpeggios consists in light movements of the hand which turns fast towards the continuous changing direction so as under these circumstances fingers get their necessary liberty of action.

Ultimately, but not in the last, the performer has to bear in mind at all times the epigraph a quote taken from Henri de Regnier: 'River god laughing as the water tickles him'. Through Regnier's verses *Ravel* makes the performer aware of the musical sense subsequently of the touch and sound colour. In this case the brilliance and the virtuosity, even *Ravel* didn't want it to be played fast, seem to be a difficult goal to be aiming though *Liszt* prior piano guidelines jointly with *Ravel* ones are invaluable means towards getting the desired result.

Nevertheless main theme problems are far away of being solved. Next subchapters are to add more explanations each completing the previous ones.

3. 2. b. Equal importance of the hands involvement.

Crossways the whole piece both hands summarize same level of impact: either about piano technique or expressiveness and musical sense.

One could find the 'environment' of the main idea structured in a rather *Lisztian* way: divided figurations between the two hands granted with comparable technique difficulties. Further to the difficult right hand's arpeggios the pianist has to face augmented double notes in the left hand. The involvement of double notes of fifths and sixths on arpeggios paths is another problem to be solved. Although quavers they are increasing the level of difficulty of the right hand. Virtuosity problem is still about using a light hand able to produce a light sound. Awareness of their musical role is of a certainly help: placed in the

middle and the high piano register they are completing and greatly supporting harmonically the right hand's E major atmosphere.

'The theme is cheerful and gentle, not brisk' [7].

Everything has to result in a nice evenness of the sound quality and dynamics which finally is as much of a help as a difficult aim too. Thinking the figurations of the left hand through these recommendation positive effects will occur for the right hand too. As hands are sharing same difficulties they are working together for the ultimately touch sense.

As a last recommendation it seems avoiding to produce a dry *crescendo* towards the pick of the climbing figurations is part of an accurate performing way. As long as there is less about a comprehensible melodic line in the classical acceptance, there is more about colour and fluid appearance. Therefore it could be replaced by a fine shaping suggestion which could beneficially influence the required gentle brilliance of the sound, a better control of its expression evenness, to a smooth and legato beginning [8].

3. 2. c. Figurations integrated with a quasy- main melodic line. Thumb in charge with the quasi-melodic line.

As there is concluded in the previous subchapters a light hand able to move easily the wrist and the arm towards the arpeggios directions is an exceptionally necessary requirement.

Another remarkable *Liszt* feature to deal with refers over again to the arpeggios

figurations of the right hand. Ultimately they seem to be releasing a quasi-melodic line formed by the two keys at the beginning of each changing harmonic and rhythmical zone: *D sharp* and *C sharp*, as they can be seen in the musical example. They alternate in basic E major harmonies in *semiquavers* and *demisemiquavers*. In this circumstance there could be noticed each harmonic and rhythmical zone starts with a note played by the thumb. They release an apparently spontaneous quasy-melodic line engaged by the thumb which is leading the changing harmonies. But here we come! This is another specific *Liszt* piano art feature and it's solving indubitably comes again from *Liszt* himself: a standing position of the thumb is of a great aid.

At this point of the completion it has to be emphasized this working solution for a major of problems approached so far: the thumb playing in a rather vertical position is preparing a functional hand shape in favour towards its actions. In this way here the pianist is enabled for getting all targets in one important hand feature. The favourable shape helps the hand for playing easily the rest of the figurations until the next changing harmony. Playing *D sharp* and *C sharp* in an accurate position of the thumb is a working out key for most problems: of technique, sound colour, rhythmical evenness or regarding the touch expression.

At a deeper look one can see *D sharp* corresponding to the tensioned role of a 7th major interval formed together with the E key in the left hand. As this interval is placed right in the opening the thumb pressing it would get it can get a slightly

different touch with the figurations. Getting a slightly more glassy sonority than the other notes is a certain option helped by the harmonic relation sonority of a 7th major. In this respect I would suggest it has not to be a silky touch but instead of it would be recommended a more direct one. This way there is a justification more towards avoiding to produce a too 'obvious' crescendo: among the notes of the climbing figurations the one played by the thumb is situated on the most tensioned position of this E major environment.

Ultimately the two alternate harmonies spread in arpeggios must not be made sounding like too different touches. This mistake could easily be done by not very experimented pianists due to the technique difficulty intensified by the changing rhythmic values.

3. 2. d. The use of pedal as an active ingredient on the performance.

A last *Lisztian* piano art value proposed here is the use of pedal as an active factor of the performance with references to its significant role. In this respect a good use of a needed refined pedalling is a key for a proper final result. Pedalling gets empowered with a wide diversity: half pedals use, whole pedal, disharmonic or vibrating pedals, helping harmonies as a whole or comprising superposed harmonies theoretically incompatible. All of them comprise their expression aim as a real water feeling.

One of the most illustrative examples still leaves in the main musical idea. The first two related harmonies, the E major and its subdominant would leave in same

pedalling gesture so as there is brilliantly suggested the movement of the water going up and coming down. Noticeably it comes out this action without changing pedal as in the upper register the sounds mixture won't disturb the hearing but they will bring out the watery sonority. This requirement would be accomplished in a different degree according to the adaptation to different pianos sound.

4. Results and Discussions

Evoking several Lisztian features of Ravel's *Jeux d'eau* is high illustrative for the point of view of this article: using *Liszt's* technique achievements performers can get nearer to *Ravel* particular expression.

The similarity of the two titles is a prior indication of *Ravel's* programme filiation. Further to the programme title there is a certain sensuality which shows another common point of the two works.

Demonstration drawn here started from pointing out *Ravel's* programme filiation but attempted to emphasize a straight possible link between *Liszt* piano means and *Ravel* required ones towards a proficient performance.

Catching a view of *Liszt's* modern piano principles could be demonstrative in *Liszt's* determination of further novelty in modern times of music.

Certainly the *Ravel* piece is providing a lot more particular piano situations to refer to further. There are still left out discussions on the border of the wide range of touches or colour elements which could be another attractive goal to reach. In this piece *Ravel* gives a high

prove of his fine mastery by exploiting all the piano registers in an unaccomplished till then diversity of sound. All comprised in just one single piano work. There could be developed too special debates on how approaching the fluidity of the movement so they would be illustrative for how more accurately emphasising the musical content of this piece. A right accomplishment of the great diversity of musical expressions would concern finding most favourable speed or fluidity of the movements.

The intended appraisal of the great *Liszt* through *Ravel's* innovative *Jeux d'eau* is not finished yet with this article. This is just first step in a further possible series on same generous issue. There is just a little amount approached till this point.

5. Conclusions.

There are never enough words in showing the great *Liszt* personality. He was in the possession of so different and multiple facets as interminable source of inspiration which have widely influenced a large range of composers.

One of the main conclusions is about the demonstration here: the *Ravel's* *Jeux d'eau* central impressionistic appearance is based on a pertinent *Liszt* supportive technique towards getting it. Here *Liszt* sparkling featured virtuosity is a main ingredient towards a good impressionistic accomplishment if we refer just to its *touché*.

The opening of the XXth Century is marked by one of its most famous piano works by *Maurice Ravel* composed in 1901. This work marked the beginning of

the modern times in piano music and was built on many of previous *Liszt* achievements without which maybe one couldn't imagine *Ravel's* composition.

Its novelty embodies a boundary stone of the XXth Century but quite a few of *Liszt's* piano art features seem to maintain its ultimate impressionist artistry.

As an ending nothing could be better than Alfred Cortot's statement. In his acceptance with this piece *Ravel* 'inaugurates the series of those descriptive and virtuoso ones through which rediscovers towards pianist's delight the secret of that sparkling piano art, of that impressionism of reflexes and reflections in, that *Liszt* has imbued with the music of his times'.

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