

Giuseppe Donizetti and Franz Liszt

Giuseppe Donizetti, the eldest child of Andrea and Domenica Donizetti, was born in Bergamo on November 7, 1788. He had musical instruction from Giacomo Carini, who had married his aunt - Andrea Donizetti's sister - Angela. Simone Mayr was impressed with his musical ability as he gave him 19 private lessons without payment.

In 1808, Giuseppe was conscripted into the army of the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy, taking part in campaigns in Austria and Spain, becoming flutist in a military band stationed on Elba during Napoleon's exile there. In 1815 he married in Portoferraio a local girl named Angela Tondi.

Giuseppe Donizetti was on board of the ship on which Napoleon, escaping from Elba, returned to France, and was with the Napoleonic troops during the Hundred Days till Waterloo. Leaving the French service, he returned to Italy and enlisted in the army of the Kingdom of Sardinia and Piedmont becoming Director of the Reggimento Provinciale di Casale. In Alessandria, on April 29, 1818 his only son was born. Named Andrea, this child would grow up to become his uncle Gaetano's companion in Paris during his final illness.

In 1827, events in remote Constantinople began to affect Giuseppe Donizetti's career: Mahmud II, Sultan of Turkey, wishing to put his armed forces into better order, detailed his grand vizier, Hosrev Pasha, to hire a first-rate musical director. The Minister of Sardinia and Piedmont to the Sublime Porte recommended Giuseppe Donizetti for the position authorizing him to become „Istruttore Generale delle Musiche Imperiali Ottomane“.

Donizetti's Turkish career prospered from the beginning. In 1829, he composed *Mahmudié*, a march in the Sultan's honor, which was performed to everyone's delight by Giuseppe's military students. When Abdul Medjid succeeded to the imperial throne in 1830, Donizetti's star rose still higher, as he had been on friendly terms with the new Sultan, for whom he prepared a march entitled *Medjidié*. In 1831, he was decorated with the Order of Nichan-Iftikar, earned later a box with the imperial cipher in diamonds.

He was made honorary colonel of the Imperial Guard, pasha and a brigadier general! His marches, songs and piano pieces were being published in Milan by Ricordi, he became sufficiently well known to be listed by Fetis in the „Biographie Universelle des Musiciens“ (Paris 1833-44). For his services to the French music he was awarded the Legion of Honour,

Giuseppe Donizetti began the organisation of an annual opera season at Pera staging many Italian operas, especially those of his brother Gaetano. The new Imperial Opera in Constantinople opened in 1846, - thanks to Giuseppe - with *Belisario*, the famous opera of Gaetano, which action takes place in the same city, „opera which not only pleased and delighted, but also conquered, enflamed, ravished the full auditorium“.

Same year Franz Liszt started one of his most remote, adventurous and spectacular travels in his exciting life. On November 1, 1846 he left Buda for Transylvania, together with some influential Magyar friends in a coach with 8 horses. Being in a society of Hungarian nobles, he was suspect in the eyes of the Romanian majority of inhabitants and was booed in Sibiu, where he had the unfortunate idea to play the *Rakoczy March* before a public with a Romanian and German majority. Despite the insuccess of Sibiu, Liszt remained with an excellent impression about Transylvania and his triumphs in Timisoara, Cluj and Brasov.

On December 12 he crossed the Southern Carpathian mountains going to Bucharest as guest of Prince Michael Ghika. In Bucharest, he had 3 concerti: two in the National Theatre, the third in the palace of Prince Bibesco. From there he went to Jassy, capital of Moldova, where his fame was already known. During his 4 concerts, he improvised a fantasy on the themes of the Moldavian overture of Flechtenmacher, founder of the Romanian musical school, which he had to play 3 times combining it with the folkloric „hora“.

He left Moldova for the Ukraine, travelling to its major city - Kyiv. Here he met, for the first time, Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, who became the great love of his mid life. The Princess, being very rich, had 30,000 serfs on her 14 properties, was separated from her husband and administrated herself her immense fortune. She invited Liszt to Woronince where he remained more than a month, being fascinated by the Princess. End of March Liszt left Woronince and gave some concerts in Lemberg (today Lviv), crossed Moldova again and took a ship in the Danubian harbour of Galatz to travel to Constantinople.

He had to accept a quarantine, and reached Constantinople on June 8, admiring the beautiful scenery along the 32 kilometres of the Bosphorus Street. Two hours after his arrival he played on the piano sent to him by Pierre Erard in the Palace of Siragan before the Sultan Abdul Medjid. The Sultan, despite of his harem with 400 concubines, was very influenced by Western culture and spoke an excellent French. Liszt received the Nichan-Iftikar order (like Giuseppe 15 years before) and gave some concerts, especially in the Russian Embassy, admiring the superb panorama of the Golden Horn.

He met Giuseppe Donizetti, who assisted to all of his concerts, and invited him to hear his military band. The sympathy between the two musicians was immediate and Liszt played many of his fantasies, variations, paraphrases or reminiscences inspired by Gaetano's operas. Enthusiastic about the spectacular marches of Giuseppe Donizetti played by huge ensembles of the Turkish army, Liszt - as a sign of friendship and consideration - composed his *Grande Paraphrase de la Marche pour Sa Majesté, le Sultan Abdul Medjid-Khan* (which was edited in Berlin in 1848).

Liszt left Constantinople via the same route - Galatzi-Odessa, - where he met again his Princess, and Elisavetgrad, the town where he had the last four concerts of his virtuoso career. After the end of his heyday (he was only 36 years old), he would never play again for his benefit. It was the big turning point in Liszt's life, at an age when Mozart died.

Giuseppe continued his successful career in Constantinople and survived both of his brothers, dying in Constantinople on February 12, 1856 at the age of 67. He was buried in the Cathedral of the city, where his tomb can be seen today.

Professor Alexander Weatherson asked recently the Turkish diva Leyla Gencer, during her next visit home to take a picture of the grave of Giuseppe Donizetti to be published in the next *Donizetti News*.



(By Constantin Erbiceanu, member in the Donizetti and Liszt societies)



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