

**F.A.M.E. III**  
**May - June 2007**  
**Franz Liszt**  
**1811 – 1886**

*(suggested costume: black pants, white shirt, black jacket – or gypsy dress)*

(Show pictures of Franz Liszt.) These are pictures of our composer for the month, Franz Liszt. In his day he was the equivalent of a popular rock star. When he performed, female admirers fainted during his performances, fought over his handkerchiefs, his old cigar butts, and used the water from his washstand. They would even drink leftover tea from his cup. Like the rock stars of today who play benefit concerts to help those in need, Liszt also performed at benefits. He performed a concert to support victims of flooding in Hungary and he also performed a concert to help raise money to build a monument for Beethoven.

Liszt was eccentric and flamboyant in his dress and performance behavior. He could be compared to Liberace. While playing quiet sections in a compositions, he would fix his glance on a lady in the audience as if he were delivering some intimate message, and then, following the quickening tempo of the music, his lips would quiver and his nostrils would flare until the music reached a climax and he would victoriously toss back his mane of shoulder-length hair. Often after playing a piece, he would leave the stage and walk into the audience, eventually returning to the piano to continue his performance.

Many Gomes students are preparing for piano recitals. Franz Liszt was the first musician to do an entire performance by himself and he called it a recital. When Liszt performed “recitals” in England, the English were confused as they were unsure how someone could “recite upon a piano?” (definition of recite: to repeat a piece of poetry or prose before an audience, as for entertainment). Franz Liszt performed many recitals. He traveled throughout Europe performing and especially liked to mix with the royal families. He was a true entertainer. He sometimes demanded a piano on the railway platform of some small train stations. While waiting between trains he would give a short recital for the crowd (whose town was too small to be included on his concert tour).

### His music

Liszt invented the symphonic poem, which is a one movement orchestral composition usually based on a work of literature. Prior to Liszt, musical compositions were usually written as 3 to 5 different movements, each with varying tempos or themes. There was usually a pause between each movement. Liszt’s compositions flowed from one theme or tempo to the next, much like the modern music heard today.

Franz Liszt became acquainted with gypsies, and the music of gypsies, in his youth. The gypsies were (and still are) a group of nomadic people who traveled all over Europe. Their music was very different than the kind of music being played at concert halls during Liszt’s lifetime. As a boy, Franz enjoyed watching the gypsies pull their carts into the square and set up their tents. In the evening they lit their torches and built bonfires, dancing around singing nostalgic songs and playing dazzling tunes on their violins. Liszt remained fascinated with the gypsies and returned to Hungary in the 1840’s to study the music more thoroughly. He wrote 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies during his lifetime. This piece is called Hungarian Rhapsody #2 (**track 12**).

Hungarian Rhapsody #2 has the basic form of the Hungarian national dance (Csardas). It begins with a slow, melancholy dance of the men, (Lassu), then is followed by a wildly animated dance in pairs, with a sharply accented rhythm suggesting the click of spurs (Friska). Liszt captured the variations in tempo and differences in the tonal scale used by the gypsies. The song is about 9 ½ minutes long. The more

animated part of the song begins around 5 ½ minutes into the piece. *Another option is to show Who Framed Roger Rabbit (towards the end of chapter 3, 14:55 into the movie- lasts about 5 minutes. Students can listen to Hungarian Rhapsody as performed by Daffy and Donald Duck playing “dueling piano”s in a bar. Disney used Hungarian Rhapsody in numerous cartoons)*

### Biography

Franz was born in Hungary in 1811. His father, Adam, was employed by the royal family in Hungary. (Prince Esterhazy). Franz was sickly as a toddler and at one point he was so close to death that the village carpenter was asked to prepare a coffin. His health improved and his father began to teach him the piano. Franz, like Mozart, was a child prodigy; he had a musical ear and could repeat any song his father played for him.

Franz' father quit his job and became his son's manager, arranging performances for him throughout Europe. It is reported that Beethoven was so moved by Liszt's playing that he went up to the stage and kissed the boy. (the only problem with this story is that at the time it supposedly occurred, Beethoven was deaf and Beethoven also supposedly disliked concerts performed by child prodigies). There was good publicity associated with this story, so Adam Liszt never denied the story. Franz Liszt would also tell the story to his audience, pointing to where Beethoven kissed him on the cheek.

By the time Franz was 12, he was a very popular performer. It was not unusual for Franz to perform before 3 – 4,000 people. By the time Franz was 14, he was tired of performing and begged his father to let him become a priest. His father would hear nothing of it. Two years later, his father died and Franz became the sole breadwinner and had to continue to perform to support his family.

When he was 19, Franz heard a violinist perform (Paganini) and was so moved he began practicing eight to twelve hours per day on the piano in order to move the audience as much as, and play as well as, the violinist he heard perform. By all accounts, he was able to achieve this feat. Liszt is widely regarded as the greatest pianist of his time

When Franz was 36, with the help of a wealthy Russian princess as a benefactor, he was able to end his piano concert career. He spent the next half of his life as a piano teacher (many times without charging his pupils), directing concerts, writing and composing. (He also went to Rome for religious studies when he was 50 years old). He often helped struggling composers by presenting their works to the public. Richard Wagner was one composer he helped. His daughter eventually married Wagner. Franz Liszt died of pneumonia at Bayreuth, on July 31, 1886. *(Note: Liszt never married. He had three children by a mistress, a Countess named Marie d'Agoult who left her husband to live with Liszt. He fell in love with a Russian princess (who was the benefactor referred to earlier), Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein who also happened to be married when she went to live with Liszt. Liszt, a devout Catholic, went to Rome in hope that the Pope would allow Carolyne to annul her marriage (and then Liszt & Carolyn could marry). The pope refused.*

Hungarian Rhapsody #2, when the tempo is fast, time seems to speed up, as you get caught up in the excitement of the music. When the tempo is slow, time seems to drag on while you are waiting for something exciting to happen. Our painting today illustrates how you might feel about time sometimes passing slowly and sometimes racing by ....