

Canadian University Music Review

Revue de musique des universités canadiennes

Alan Walker. *Franz Liszt: Volume Two, The Weimar Years, 1848-1861*. Vol. II. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989. xix. 626 pp.

Gaynor G. Jones

Volume 10, Number 1, 1990

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1014898ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014898ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes

ISSN

0710-0353 (print)

2291-2436 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Jones, G. G. (1990). Review of [Alan Walker. *Franz Liszt: Volume Two, The Weimar Years, 1848-1861*. Vol. II. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989. xix. 626 pp.] *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 10(1), 118–120. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014898ar>

All Rights Reserved © Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes, 1990

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

REVIEWS/COMPTEs RENDUS

ALAN WALKER. *Franz Liszt: Volume Two, The Weimar Years, 1848–1861*. Vol. II. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989. xix. 626 pp.

In September 1847, Liszt played his last professional piano recital and retired at the age of thirty-five, at the peak of his performing career, thereby keeping “the legend of his playing untarnished” (Vol. I. p. 442). It is on this note that the earlier volume of Alan Walker’s trilogy, *Franz Liszt: Volume One, The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847*, ends. That volume first appeared in 1983 (Faber and Faber) after a decade or so of painstaking research. Walker’s documentary evidence in volume one substantiates the engrossing narrative of the virtuoso pianist’s travels during which Liszt had ventured further on his tours, played more concerts in such a brief time than any other pianist, and captivated the public. The second volume, completed over a six-year span, provides a totally different picture of Liszt. It reveals a Liszt living more modestly than during those more lavish, decadent former years, and now in partial seclusion as *Kapellmeister* in the town of Weimar.

Weimar attracted Liszt partly because of its rich cultural past as the home of Goethe and Schiller, partly because of its theatre, and partly because the Grand Duchess Maria Pawlowna, the sister of Tsar Nicholas I of Russia, was there. Here in this town of only 11,823 people, Liszt could retreat. Walker draws you into a realistic reconstruction of Liszt’s Weimar life. He shows it to be a far cry from the idyllic retreat where, as legend has it, all was rosy with the composition of his major orchestral works, his orchestral conducting and his master-classes in piano playing. By taking the reader on a pilgrimage not just to the shrine of the Altenburg, where Liszt and his mistress Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein lived, but also through the trials of their daily lives, Walker is able to give a multidimensional picture in which the hues of grey and purple emerge from what was formally considered through rose-tinted spectacles. As Walker expresses it:

Liszt was too great a personality for such a small place as Weimar; he aroused envy and made enemies. The petty squabbles and malicious intrigue to which he was subjected, almost from the first day of his arrival in “the Athens of the North,” gradually wore him down and eventually forced his resignation. They produced the sorry spectacle of a giant in Lilliput. (Vol. II, p. 8)

No-one has revealed this story of what it was like for Liszt and Princess Carolyne to live in this provincial town as Walker has done. No-one has perused the documents in such loving detail. One is tempted to say all the documents, but Walker has already shown new sources discovered since his first volume. His picture of Princess Carolyne is sympathetic yet realistic. Finally, one grows to understand her relationship with Liszt. This was the man who, after all, was the toast of Europe in his virtuoso years and had the charisma of someone like a modern-day rock star. The Machiavellian intrigues both about her inheritance and the annulment of her former marriage are

brilliantly depicted. The unravellings owe something to the detective novel. And, as anyone who has worked in the Vatican Archives, the Archives Nationales de France and provincial European archives will know, it takes tremendous patience and perseverance to sift through the records to find the documentary evidence. Some of the results of Walker's labours are reproduced in the appendices of this volume and include excerpts from the Vatican's marriage-file on Liszt and Princess Carolyne, their wills, and the birth certificate of Daniel Liszt, discovered since Walker's first volume. Walker presents his reader with just the right amount of documentary material both in his absorbing narrative and in the appendices which complement it. The portraits and facsimiles make it an appealing volume; the map of the Ukraine and the Wittgenstein-Iwanowsky family tree enable us to see Princess Carolyne's heritage as clearly as that of Liszt in the first volume.

Like the books on Beethoven by Thayer-Forbes and Maynard Solomon, Walker's *Franz Liszt* volumes belong on every scholar's shelf. Life and works studies may not be the fashion in scholarship these days but Walker's work is a testament to what has long been needed with a musical personality as famous as that of Liszt. It is a model of modern scholarly biography and its style is distinctly Walker's. His prose is elegant and occasionally witty. Only once does it jar with a recondite word like "pother". His study is neither pure biography like Thayer-Forbes nor a life and works study in the traditional sense. It is as though Liszt the creator of the new forms demands his own format.

Liszt's biography, in short, forms a vibrant whole, with life and music engaged in constant, creative dialogue. (p. 22)

Walker introduces a few studies of individual pieces like the *Faust* and *Dante* Symphonies and the B Minor Sonata at the right place in the narrative, without disturbing the flow of the text, and in few words illuminates our older views of these pieces. He reveals Liszt the orchestrator and conductor as well as Liszt the leader of the new musical ideas in the "War of the Romantics." Insights into Liszt's daily life and its tribulations with both orchestra and family, his interaction with the personalities in his circle, his failings as well as his talents, all these contribute to a vivid and moving document. Walker also lends a new perspective not only to Liszt but also to Berlioz, von Bülow, Wagner and the Schumanns.

This volume, for all its appropriate scholarly apparatus, is hard to stop reading. Liszt is a lion, not a mouse — remember the duel with Thalberg in volume one? — and sometimes he roars at the wrong time. But if he were not such a controversial crusader, he would not have left such a legacy. Walker's researches help one understand how he accomplished it all. The second volume surpasses even the first, for all the perhaps more familiar and more glamorous subject-matter of that earlier volume. One is impatient to hear Walker's revelations on the final period of Liszt's life. For the tale of Liszt's years in Weimar ends with a cliff-hanger:

And so Liszt turned his face towards Rome. He was nearly fifty years old. As he surveyed his turbulent years in Weimar and the destruction of his Camelot,

he must have thought that his life was almost over. Although he did not know it, a new and far more fruitful life was about to begin.

Gaynor G. Jones

* * *

GORDANA LAZAREVICH. *The Musical World of Frances James and Murray Adaskin*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988. x. 331 pp.

As suggested by her title, Gordana Lazarevich recounts the careers of Frances James and Murray Adaskin “with reference to the social, political, and cultural circumstances that affected them.” And indeed, the somewhat self-contained chapters 3 and 4 (*The Canadian performer in the 1940s; A Canadian composer in the 1940s*) might be sobering reading for today’s aspiring performers and composers who on one hand will gain an appreciation of the challenges faced four decades ago, but on the other may lament what appear to be lesser opportunities now, particularly for cross-country touring (no matter if poorly paid) and CBC employment and exposure. Perhaps it remains for a sociologist to determine whether the situation in the late 1980s is demonstrably superior to “perhaps the most difficult time in Canadian cultural history.”

In Dr. Lazarevich’s estimation, the correspondence in 1948 between Frances James and Ward French, President of the Community Concert Series, “documents an incident of considerable importance in Canadian cultural history.” The plight of the performer in the United States was not entirely dissimilar, however, for as Abram Chasins observed in *Leopold Stokowski — A Profile*, “around 1930 (Arthur) Judson acquired a subtle stranglehold on the concert business through Columbia Artists Management” and had “firm control over the musical activities and destinies of many famous orchestras, conductors, and soloists . . . this meant not only where they played but also what.”

That artists elsewhere may have languished under monopolistic practises in no way detracts from the achievements of Frances or Murray Adaskin; indeed their integrity, perseverance and artistry resulted in an enduring contribution to Canadian cultural life both directly and through countless others whose talents they nurtured.

Murray too could rise to a challenge, for in 1952 he almost singlehandedly raised funds for a Toronto Symphony concert of music by the newly formed Canadian League of Composers of which he was one of eight founding members.

Although it was not Dr. Lazarevich’s intent to provide a detailed technical analysis of Murray Adaskin’s music, Chapter 6 is an overview of “The Compositions of the Saskatoon period”, 35 musical examples of which appear in an appendix. Other appendices offer a catalogue of Adaskin’s compositions, “First or early performances