

Frédéric-François Chopin (February 22 or March 1, 1810 – October 17, 1849) in his nocturne writing was initially influenced by John Field, but later had developed it into one of the great Romantic music genres. David Dubal writes that nocturnes are "more aptly described as ballades in miniature." Chopin's mastery of melody, expressive phrasing, almost impressionistic tonal color and dissonance made each of his nocturnes into an exquisite dramatic love poem.

The *Nocturne in C minor, Op. 48 No. 1*, written in 1841, is "the noblest nocturne of them all" (James Huneker). Tragedy and poetry of this nocturne is unmatched in any other. It expresses the deepest anguish, starting with a solemn funeral march-like theme, followed by chorale in chords suggestive of angelic celestial harps. The stormy octave part is Lisztian in style, and the last section is heartbreaking in its despondency.

Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat major, Op. 61 was dedicated to Mme A. Veyret, written and published in 1846. Its complex form and harmonies were not easily understood in Chopin's lifetime by public, critics, and even progressive musicians, including Liszt. Chopin wrote: "I'd like to finish something that I don't yet know what to call". A Polonaise flavor of this piece is in its melodic and rhythmic character, but Chopin referred to it in original conception just as a Fantaisie. It does remind of the F minor Fantaisie: common key signature, underlying motive in descending 4th, dreamy middle part in B Major, A-flat Major coda. Both pieces possess the same kind of melancholy and strength of inner passion. According to Jeffrey Kallberg, Polonaise-Fantaisie represents a change in Chopin's style from "late" to "last" - unconventional transitions and theme transformation, contradictory combination of heroic style of polonaise with romanticism of a nocturne. Frequent changes of harmony in succession of keys reflect fleeting memories, nuanced emotions, and add ambiguity to the musical narrative.

In 1947, one of the first critics to understand Polonaise-Fantaisie, Arthur Hedley, wrote that it "works on the hearer's imagination with a power of suggestion equaled only by the F minor Fantasy or the fourth Ballade", and "spirit that breathes" in Chopin's polonaises is "pride in the past, lamentation for the present, hope for the future".

Franz Liszt (October 22, 1811 - July 31, 1886) started working on the second volume of his *Années de pèlerinage*, the "*Italian Years*", while traveling in Italy with Marie d'Agoult. It reveals Liszt's admiration for Renaissance poetry and art. Liszt got acquainted with the poems by Francesco Petrarca (or Petrarch, 1304-1374), when he and Marie d'Agoult read together works by Petrarca and Dante. Most of the 366 poems in Petrarca's *Canzoniere* are sonnets about his unrequited love for Laura. Liszt's sketchbook contained about 171 melodies for 3 Sonnets he was transcribing for voice and for piano in the nocturne style. Liszt wrote in 1846: "I think they have come out exceptionally well, and are more perfect in form than anything I have published until now."

The *Tre Sonetti* have four versions: two vocal, and two for piano solo.

In the first sonnet, #47 '*Benedetto sia 'l giorno*', Liszt creatively wonders through the keys, making the warmly delicate theme sound anew each time, corresponding to blessings for Laura

in the poem. The second sonnet, #104 '*Pace non trovo*', in the poem describes contradictory ardent feelings and love paradoxes. Liszt captures all of it superbly by contrasts between frantic despair, fiery passion and rapture in unusual chord progressions, beautiful theme, improvisatory passages, and gentle ending. The third sonnet, #123 '*I vidi in terra angelici costumi*' compares Laura's beauty to angels on earth. Heart-stopping, almost aerial melodies and floating harmonies allude to prayers and gratitude for love.

Après une Lecture de Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata ('*After a Reading of Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*'), also known as the '*Dante*' *Sonata*, is a piano sonata in one movement, completed by Liszt in 1849. It was inspired by Victor Hugo's poem 'After a Reading of Dante' - the most famous epic poem by Dante Alighieri, the *Divine Comedy*. It was published in 1856 as part of the second volume of his '*Années de pèlerinage*', together with the sonnets. This sonata is the most important and longest work in the cycle, and is regarded to be one of the most difficult pieces for the piano, requiring physical and emotional stamina. It has a cyclical structure of a hybrid sonata form blended with elements of a fantasy. This compositional style with its thematic transformation, improvisatory character, harmonic structure, as well as introduction of slow and melodic middle section, common to the *B Minor Sonata* and the *Grosses Konzertsolo*, was innovative and rebellious against conventional musical structures.

There are two main themes in '*Dante*' *Sonata*. The first one is chromatic and in D minor, conveying lamenting souls in Hell. In music, D minor is a key often depicting death (Mozart's *Requiem* and the statue scene of *Don Giovanni*, Liszt's *Totentanz*, etc.). To emphasize an image of Hell, Liszt uses the "Devil's interval", tritone: augmented 4th or diminished 5th, which in music portrays Devil. The secondary theme is derived from the first one with its chromatic sections, but now it is an elevated F-sharp Major chorale, expressing Heavenly joy. It is also believed that this theme impersonates Beatrice Portinari, whom Dante loved. In the last part of this composition, chromatic stream of octaves is emulating the three heads of Satan in Inferno, splitting into three distinct themes. Victorious thunder of chords ends in D Major. '*Dante*' *Sonata* surmises Liszt's innovations in musical form and harmony, establishing him as one of the most influential and forward-looking composers of the nineteenth century.

In the virtuosic, moody, charming, and brilliant *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 14*, as in his other *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, Liszt used Hungarian folk themes, influenced by Gypsy (Roma) music. Some of these were written by amateur and professional Hungarian composers, played by Gypsy bands. Liszt structured his Rhapsodies in the style of 'Verbunkos' - a Hungarian dance in different sections, with the *lassan* and the *friska* (slow and fast) parts, having the components of Gypsy improvisation, Hungarian Gypsy scale and sounds of the Gypsy bands (like *cimbalom*). Franz Doppler, with revisions by Liszt, arranged Rhapsodies Nos. 2, 5, 6, 9, 12, and 14 for orchestra. *Rhapsody No. 14* was also arranged by Liszt's into *Hungarian Fantasia* for piano and orchestra, S.123.