

Creation Background and Musical Features of *Sposalizio*

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Abstract: This article finds out the implied relation through the research of Raphael's painting "Our Lady's Wedding" and Liszt's emotional experience, in addition to creative background of "Sposalizio", the creative approach is also very characteristic. Such as the using of pentatonic scale in the first theme, the variation of harmony colour, the using many music terms and impressionist style are very worth to research.

Keywords: *Sposalizio*, Liszt, *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage: Italie*

1. Introduction

Sposalizio is a part of *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage: Italie*. The year of 1837, Liszt and her lover Marie d'Agoult went to Italy, "The Marriage of the Virgin" as Raphael's one of great works caused Liszt's creative inspiration. The painting the marriage of the Virgin was created in the Renaissance, and Raphael's teacher Perugino also created the same theme works. In contrast to the two works, in addition to the picture gentler delicate people look more vivid and delicate, the biggest difference is highlighted a suitor who is breaking olive branch. This represents the humanist ideology of anti-religious theocracy during the Renaissance. And Liszt's unique love experience of his life has a strong correlation with the humanistic ideas expressed by Raphael's "The Marriage of the Virgin". The two marriages that Liszt expects are prevented by the doctrine of the church. And these creative backgrounds have direct connection with the emotions and meanings of *Sposalizio*. Therefore, *Sposalizio* is expressed not only by the musical language to describe the painting "The Marriage of the Virgin". Especially the later part of the aria melody is more like the expression of emotion.

2. In-depth exploration of *Sposalizio* creative background

2.1. Introduction of Franz Liszt's *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage: Italie* and *Sposalizio*

Sposalizio was composed by Franz Liszt. "The Marriage of the Virgin" as Raphael's one of great works caused Liszt's creative inspiration. This thesis mainly about in-depth exploration of *Sposalizio* creative background. The background include the contact between *Sposalizio* and "The Marriage of the Virgin" of Raphael and the relationship between the love experience and "The Marriage of the Virgin" of Raphael. The Characteristic of creation is another focus of this paper. Through the analysis of music to study the characteristic of Liszt's music language. Finally combined with music features and creative background to study performance characteristics.

In The romantic period is a period when subjective emotions express more freedom. Whether literature, painting or music, people pay more attention to the expression of personal emotion. During this period, the diversification of creative inspiration was gradually revealed. Many musicians use poetry and painting as the source of their own music creation. *Sposalizio* as a part of *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage: Italie* is the perfect combination of painting and music. This is also Liszt's best music creation method. "The "Italian" book of the *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage*, better known than the "Swiss" one, is based on nature impressions, but on experiences in the realm of great art. Instead of sunshine and thunderstorm, lakes and mountain-tops, the impulses to write theses come from pictures, sculpture, poetry." Liszt used the characteristics of painting and fully exploited the performance potential of painting to make the feelings of musical works similar to the emotion of painting, so that the perfect combination of musical works and paintings. *Années de pèlerinage* include three suits for solo piano which was composed from 1835 to 1838. These three suits are *Première année: Suisse*,

Deuxième année: Italie and Troisième année. Liszt wrote in notes for the Analekta album *Années de pèlerinage*: “Having recently travelled to many new countries, through different settings and places consecrated by history and poetry; having felt that the phenomena of nature and their attendant sights did not pass before my eyes as pointless images but stirred deep emotions in my soul, and that between us a vague but immediate relationship had established itself, an undefined but real rapport, an inexplicable but undeniable communication, I have tried to portray in music a few of my strongest sensations and most lively impressions.” Liszt in this note illustrates the reason for why he composed these three suites.

Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage as Liszt’s original work, fully embodies the concept of Liszt’s music and creative ideas. It was widely considered a summary of the style of Liszt’s music and outstanding works. Many pieces of *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage* were inspired by painting, sculpture and poetry of the Renaissance. At the same time, Liszt presented this inspiration in the title and used his own personalized language of music to express the content and ideas in the title. The *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage* include 26 pieces of works, almost across the composer’s entire composing career and it was not amended until 1877. Liszt put the natural scenery, humanities and religious elements into his works.

Liszt is often considered a dazzle musician, most of his works are very hard to play. But many pieces of *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage* are not very difficult because technically and his deep literary accomplishment and artistic attainments. These pieces are not difficult to find in Liszt’s works. From which we can find Debussy’s impressionist style, lyrical passages, skillful fragments and even the elements of atonal music. *Sposalizio* is one of piece that the Debussy’s impressionist style can be found, Liszt is a sensitive and inner musician.

2.2. Raphael’s painting *The Marriage of the Virgin*

Sposalizio inspired from Raphael’s painting *The Marriage of the Virgin*. The year of 1837, Liszt went to Italy, the art works of the Italian Renaissance period deeply influenced him. *The Marriage of the Virgin* as Raphael’s one of great works caused Liszt’s creative inspiration. *The Marriage of the Virgin* was completed in the year of 1504, when he was 20 years old. His teacher Pietro Perugino also drew a painting named *The Marriage of the Virgin*. People always compare these two works with that same title.

2.3. The different between Raphael’s painting and version of Pietro Perugino

“Raphael’s painting *Marriage of the Virgin* is clearly a re-imagination of Perugino’s work of the same title completed sometime between 1500 and 1504. Even though Perugino’s version encompasses many elements of his earlier work *Delivery of the Keys to St. Peter*, it’s as if both artists were exploring the possibilities of the same spatial elements in depicting religious myth. Raphael, however, refined his teacher’s visual composition to a point of much greater balance and impact. That the three paintings have so many features in common is intriguing.”



Figure 1: Raphael’s version



Figure 2: Pietro Perugino's version

In the Raphael's painting, the wedding is held in a sunny square, in front of a church. The center of vision is representative of God and he is also the host of the wedding. On the left side are women who are wearing gorgeous clothes. On the right side are suitors of virgin. The suitors are holding olive branches. There is such a legend in Christianity, holding the olive branch of the suitors who want to get married to virgin but the person whose olive branch blooms is by fate the Maria's fiancé. So we can find that only Joseph's olive branch flowered. People think that blooming flowers are God's will, only Joseph can get married to virgin. This work not only focuses on the macro but also attention to detail. In the side of Joseph, a young man who cannot get married to virgin breaking the olive branch. Compare with the expression of Maria in the Middle Ages, the expression of Maria is beautiful, kind and full of humanity. But the position of the young man is different. In the Pietro Perugino's version the position of the young man is in the third row behind the bishop. If the viewer does not look carefully, the young man is hard to be found. In Raphael's version, the position of the young man is in the first row before Joseph and virgin with exaggerate action of trying hard to break olive branch. The young man becomes the most important role beside of Joseph and virgin. Why then Raphael highlighted the young man who is breaking the olive branch? The reason is related to the background of the Renaissance. In the period of Renaissance, the core of thought is Humanism. The purpose of life is to pursue the happiness of real life, advocate the liberation of individuality against ignorance and superstition of theological ideas. People are real life creators and masters affirming the value and dignity of human. Raphael's version conforms to the trend of the times. In line with the Renaissance of the pursuit of humanism. The man who is breaking the olive branch embodies the idea of opposing the religious authority. Raphael used painting to express the emotion of the humanism of Renaissance. This kind of painting art form conforms to the background of the Renaissance which is advocating humanism and against the blockade of religious system to human spirit and physical.

2.4. The inspiration of creation

Why this painting inspired Liszt? The reason connects with the love experience of Liszt. Liszt once fell in love with three women. The woman of his first love was his student Caroline de Saint-Cricq who was a daughter of nobility. But in the age of Liszt, the love between a piano teacher and Chloe was very absurd. Then Caroline de Saint-Cricq's father laid off Liszt, and soon Caroline de Saint-Cricq got married to an earl. The second woman named Marie d'Agoult also got married to an earl, but she had got married before she met Liszt. She is a very important woman in Liszt's life, she gave up her husband and her child left France then accompanied with Liszt for 11 years. During the 11 years, the lovers almost traveled half of Europe. The creation of *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage* started when they traveled to Switzerland. Marie d'Agoult wanted to divorce her husband and get married to Liszt. But due to the opposition of the Catholic Church, Marie d'Agoult could not divorce his husband.

Because of elopement, they also paid the price of love. Marie could not attend Liszt's concert. She felt painful and absurd, and she knew that she could never get a complete Liszt. Finally, they split up, and Marie left to France with her children. Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein is the last woman Liszt fell in love with. They also did not get married eventually. The last two love experiences were not approved due to the church's block. So, we can find that Liszt desires a free marriage, he rejects the marriage decided by God. However, this painting describes the situation of marriage determined by God and in the painting, highlights the suitor who is breaking the olive branch. Liszt who cannot marry lover after viewing the painting would think of his own love experience naturally. So, Liszt was not only full of sympathy for the young man who is breaking the olive branch in the painting but also expressed the regret at the impossibility of his marriage. Liszt try to capture double aspect of the painting. One is describing the scene in the painting which is defined by Raphael, Liszt just using music language to express it. Another one is the emotion hidden behind the music is the sorrow that Liszt could not get married to his lover. In other words, Liszt borrows Raphael's painting to express his own emotion. So, when one listens to *Sposalizio*, they seem to be able to hear the bells, people gathered in the square, the solemnity of conveying the will of God, the singing of suitor who do not have chance to get married to virgin and even the expression of virgin

3. Characteristic of creation

3.1. Form analysis

Table 1: Compound Ternary Form of *Sposalizio*

Interductory Tonic key area	measure no.: Motive/theme:	1 motive1&2	9 section A, based on motive 1	30 section B, Andante quieto based on motive 2
	Tonality:	E G#	G# E	E
Strophe 1 Secondary key area& Developmental		38 processional	52 processional	68 transitional/ development pedal b
		G	G	V7/E
Strophe 2 Tonal recap. &		77 processional	92 processional	98 transitional
				106 climax
Thematic synthesis		E	E	D Eb E
Concluding		113 Reminiscence of Andante quieto f#	120 coda-synthesis of all thematic material E	

The introductory section is from measure 1-30, motive 1 and motive 2 are stated. From measure 38-74 is strophe1 and measure 77- 106 is strophe2. The melody of strophe1 and strophe2 almost same with processional part, transitional part and climax. From measure 113 to 120 is concluding, this part has the characteristics of impressionism.

Table 2: Simple form representation of *Sposalizio*

A	A'	B	Re	A/B	Coda
1-8	9-37	38-67	68-76	77-119	120-133
E	G#~E	G~E	E	E~C#~E	E

In the whole *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage: Italie*, only *Sposalizio*'s time signature is 6/4 the other works are all 4/4, makes *Sposalizio* more unique and chic. When the motive appeared in the E key, Liszt used *dolce armonioso* as notation of performance to show the pure and devout mood. The first motive consists of a single note, this motive imitates the bells of the church and the pentatonic scale of Hungary is used in it. This kind of ancient pentatonic scale is paleoecetone which was used for church. The use of this kind of modulation provided the conditions to create new sound effect so that he will not be bound by the traditional laws of harmony. The melody of this motive rise and fall, we can also find the feeling of Arabesque. This motive is cleverly arranged by the composer running through the rest parts. Sometimes it appears in form of Octave sometimes it fuses into the harmony according the tone.

3.2. Characteristic of different section



Figure 3: Measure 1-4

In the measure 19, we can find that the first motive appears in the bass part.



Figure 4: Measure 19~20

9

ppp

una corda

13

poco a poco più di moto

2

5

Z. 6785

17

poco a poco accel. -

poco a poco cresc..

tre corde

21

legato

8

Figure 5: Measure 9~22

Measure 9-measure 37 is second section. This section has 3 voice parts. Most of bass part uses first motive to repeat again and again. The middle voice part is dotted half note. The harmony transfers very frequently ($\#c-\#F-e-D-\#G-E$) and transfers every two measures. The harmony of this section full of color change and sounds very unique giving people great unlimited space. One critic to call this “one of the most astonishing pages that Liszt ever wrote.” This harmony gives a peaceful and solemn feeling. From measure 9 to measure 17, the harmony arises very naturally, Liszt used whole tone scale here. The bass part full of the continuous arpeggio makes all the people in the painting seem alive. We seem to see the virgin walk to square slowly with many maid, and all the suitors holding olive branches and bishop are waiting for virgin with different posture. In the end of this section, the first theme repeats again to make a quiet ending. It seems that the church bell rings once again and all the people had reached the square.

From the 30 to 37 measures, the second motive appears in E major. It sounds like a conversation between Joseph and virgin or people's voice and echoes from a distance. This imitation of people's tone of voice is full of desire for marriage and the good expectation for love. It is similar to the expression of recitative which is full of emotion. At the same time, the first motive sound of bells still accompanies with the recitative. Measure 30-33 and measure 34-37 are two balances and symmetrical phrases. The foundation of the chords is very basic, just leading the melody to the B cadence. So, Liszt used the second motive of A section to create the two phrases as a transition.



Figure 6: Measure 30-33

The B section from measure 38-67 full of arpeggio and pillar chords throw into sharp relief the holy wedding scene. The key change to G major creating a solemn and romantic environment. The seventh chord and ninth chord were used to make a lyrical mood and colorful harmony effect. This section does not have any relationship with motive 1 and motive 2. This is new melody which is a very romantic phrase with mild and indirect soul-string. “The perspective passage that appears to be completely unrelated to the carefully established motive ideas.” In the measure 37, the B-major chord drops a third to G major directly and it does not resolve to G major. In the measure 46 and 48 we still can hear the sound of bells. Theme is very static and ethereal. Liszt use many repeated notes and bass note to embody a dream like melody. The melody of this section sounds unexpected, but the melody had been indicated at the beginning part. The chords of measure 9 reappeared. “The melody line shape follows the melody line shape of second motive.”

Although these underlying characteristics is unified, the change of tonality, rhythm, harmony and texture makes the section sounds are a new melody which is full of dramatic features. Under the elaborate design of Liszt, many fresh elements emerged making the listener to focus on the development of music and the change of the musical motive. As a performer, the relationship of different section under the potential uniformity should be reconsidered.

The function from measure 68 to 76 is a recapitulation, the melody line of this phrase adopted the elements of first motive. But Liszt used sequence development practice and many column chords to create a tension environment in only 8 measures. In the measure 75, the second motive appears again but the dynamic is *ff*. In the measure 75 and 76, the elements of first motive was used again to make the music into next section. From the measure 68 to the end is second half of Sposalizio, Liszt used the motive of section B to create a new melody in E major. The left-hand part adapts first motive based on a constant pedal tone note B and is repeated over and over to create a preparation for the climax.



Figure 7: Measure 69-81

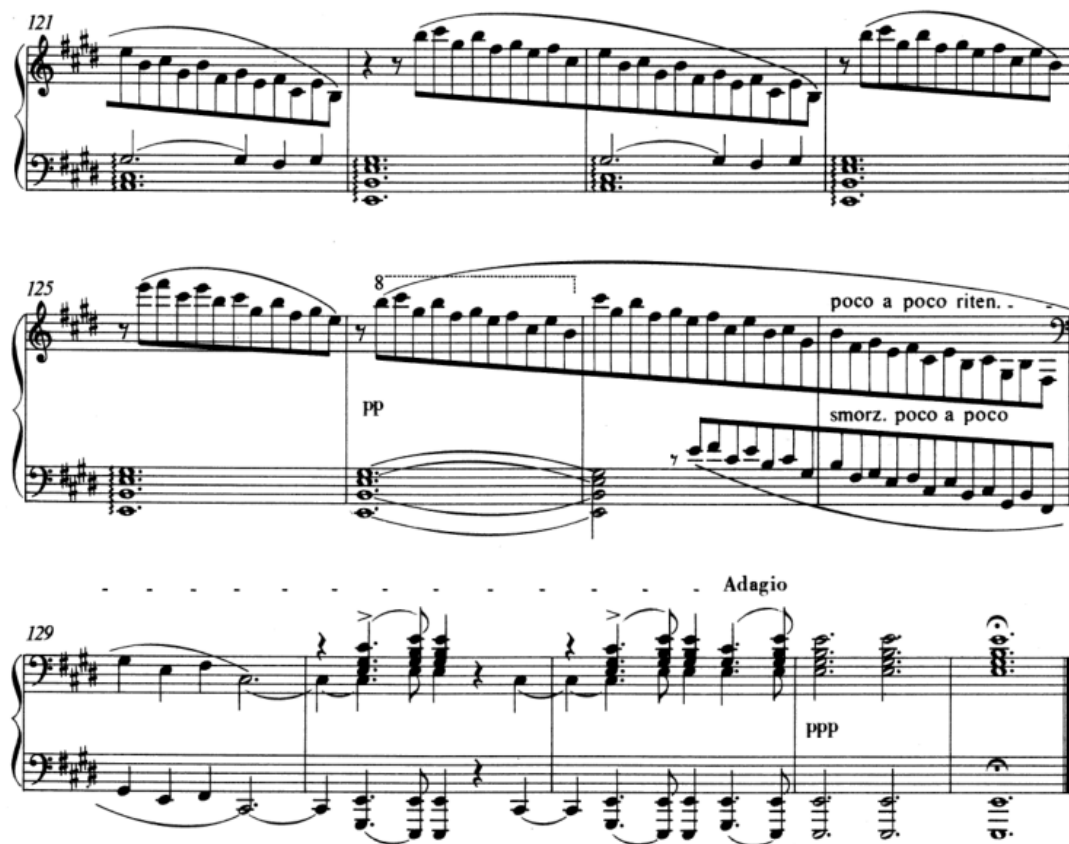


Figure 8: Measure 121-133

The section from measure 91-112 is the climax of this piece. The constant pedal tone is bass note B.

The bass note B is the dominant of E major and the third degree of G major. The bass note B is the pivot of harmony. The melody on the right hand is the motive of B section reappears in E major. The first theme of A section reappears on the left hand. Two forces coordinated development and growing, with the growing of dynamic the music developed in to the climax of piece. The first motive on the left-hand is repeated over and over in E major. In this section this cycle occurred in the E major with doubled in octaves and make this section more passionate, intense and sensuous. From measure 106-114 is the echo on C# and recall the first motive of the beginning part of this piece. In the phrase we can also find the elements of second motive and the chords of A section. Then the second motive reappeared in C# major, the resounding melody imply the beginning of all the piece.

The final section from measure 113-120 is the reappearance of the Andante quieto section. In the coda, the first motive is combined with the motive of section B in a new way. A series of plagal cadences was used in the measure from 121-124. The last cadence of measure 121-124 is IV→I provide resolution and synthesis. Finally, the whole piece ends with the church bells that are gradually gone with the dynamic of ppp. It sounds like a piece of impressionism. This kind of ending rarely heard of all the works of Liszt. Not only the ending is a lovely ending, but also an impression ending. The motive of the ending can be found in Debussy's E Major Arabesque.

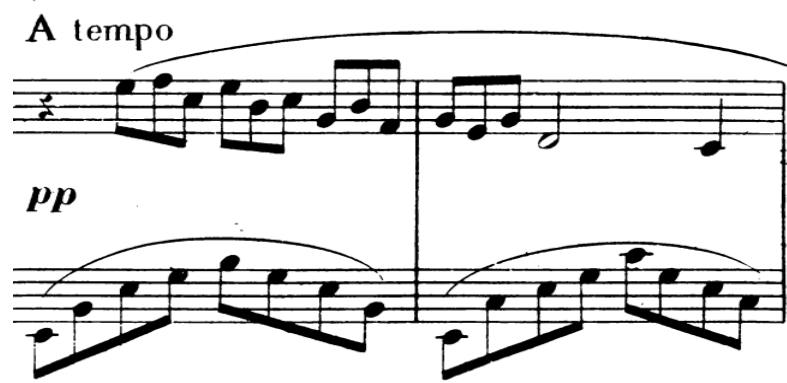


Figure 9: Debussy's E Major Arabesque

4. Performance characteristics.

4.1. The notation of performance which was written by Liszt

In the case of *Sposalizio*, Liszt used many musical expression marks, such as *docle*, *poco a poco più di moto*, *rinforz.* ed *appassionato* and *con grazia* even marking the requirement of *una corda* pedal. The requirement of the dynamic is also very detailed from *fff* to *ppp* which were carefully arranged by Liszt. Thus, it can be seen as an interpretation and manipulation of this piece of music. Tonic major is E major and the second-degree key is G major with the first motive and second motive developed all the ideas of this piece. The A section represents the first theme area, and the B section in G major represents the second theme area. The melodies of every section were unified, all of melodies from the first motive and the second motive. But the melodies of every sections are different by modifying the rhythm and tonality making every section sounds like a new section.

Compared to Raphael's *The Marriage of the Virgin*, although the painting is closest to the reality scene of marriage and detailed description of the characters, expressions, clothing, scenes and so on, it is still the moment of wearing a ring. In music works, it is hard to determine the composer specific description of the scene or emotion. If the listeners want to understand the music description of the scene, they should have a picture or text description like *Sposalizio*. However, music is art of time, with the flowing of time, music can describe the process of event development. Therefore, *Sposalizio* is the process of the marriage of virgin and Joseph not a moment of wearing ring. Everyone in the painting seems to be alive, listeners can picture the scene with their different understandings and feelings.

4.2. Characteristic of music language

In *Sposalizio*, Liszt used a lot of colorful harmony language like section B. Every kind of harmony

was carefully arranged by Liszt. Every chord and every modulation were related to the scene of the painting and the colorful harmony is full of the emotion of Liszt's inner world. The harmony modulation is #c-#F –e-D-#G-E which is not very different, but Liszt gave the modulation a complicated use and constantly pursued different color of harmony. This is an important characteristic of *Sposalizio* and even some other pieces of *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage*.

Liszt used the Humanism of Renaissance to describe the painting of Raphael and express his own emotion. This kind of music art form conforms to the background of the Renaissance which is advocating humanism and against the blockade of religious system to human spirit and the physical.

Through the research of Raphael painting "The Marriage of the Virgin" and the love experience of Liszt, this thesis elaborated In-depth exploration of *Sposalizio* creative background. The second part of the thesis is mainly about music form analysis and Liszt's music language. Combining Creative Background and Music Features to study the performance characteristic.

Liszt's two marriage have been blocked by the church, Raphael's painting "The Marriage of the Virgin" expresses the Renaissance Humanism. So *Sposalizio* it's not just a portrayal of a wedding scene, but to use the scene of the wedding to express Liszt's wedding's expectation and the frustration of reality. This has a significant impact on the emotional expression of the music. Although the first half of *Sposalizio* described the great scene of the marriage with colorful harmony, the second half still used sad arias to express the emotion of himself full of regretting and the desire for marriage.

5. Conclusion

Thus it can be seen, *Sposalizio* has a very important meaning in Liszt's music literature. Different from Liszt's other works, *Sposalizio* not only represents the peak of Liszt's composition technique, but also reflects Liszt's profound thinking on his life. It is a work worth studying and playing.

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