

Audio Guide

LISZT'S HOME



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650: Welcome

Hello and welcome to Liszt's Home!

This building dates from the late 18th century. It is known as the *Hofgärtnerei* because it originally housed the head gardener for the ducal court. For the last two decades of his life, Franz Liszt lived and worked on the first floor of the building, and received his many visitors here. Everything on display in the house was actually owned by Liszt. With the help of an inventory of his estate and old photographs

taken during the composer's lifetime, the rooms have been originally reconstructed as far as possible. You may already have seen one of the photos on the ground floor. We hope you have a very enjoyable tour of the rooms ON THIS FLOOR where Liszt lived until his death in 1886. To hear the commentaries, just key in the numbers shown in your tour flyer.

651: Music Room



In 1869, Grand Duke Carl Alexander of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach finally managed to persuade Franz Liszt to return to Weimar. Liszt, a celebrated pianist and composer, had already lived in Weimar for thirteen years earlier in his life, turning this small royal capital into a centre for contemporary music renowned across Europe. Now, the Grand Duke offered Liszt these rooms, idyllically situated at the entrance of the park, for his own use. Together with her two daughters, Grand Duchess Sophie, the Grand Duke's wife, personally supervised the furnishings and decorations – and it was much appreciated. As Liszt wrote shortly after moving in:

“Nothing was overlooked in furnishing my apartment pleasantly and even elegantly. It comprises four rooms: the salon [...], which is divided into two parts by red-

green Algerian hangings which can be closed as desired; the dining room, a bedroom and a room for Fortunato. Indeed, this apartment has a ‘Wagnerian’ luxury, which one has hardly been used to in this good town of Weimar.”

As we are told, one of the rooms was for Fortunato, Liszt's valet. The portrait over the piano was also painted in 1869, the year Liszt moved back to Weimar. He was 58 years old. Are you surprised to see the “king of the pianists” dressed in priestly robes? Liszt's own contemporaries felt rather similar in 1865 when they discovered this talented virtuoso had taken minor orders in the Catholic Church during a stay in Rome. Even as a child, Liszt had been fascinated by religion. But despite wearing a cassock after 1865 and calling himself ‘Abbé Liszt’, his new religious status hardly changed his life. Liszt could be seen regularly in Weimar during the summer, and spent the rest of the year in Rome and Budapest – unless he was invited to perform at a concert in one of the other major European cities as a guest conductor or guest of honour. Even when he was much older, with his physical powers failing, he remained the restless person he always had been. So how did Liszt spend his time here in Weimar? To find out, just key in 67.



As always, the piano was the focal point of Liszt's life. The piano was his passion – and thanks to the piano maker Carl Bechstein, he did not have to make do without a special grand piano in Weimar. In a cheerful mood, Liszt wrote to Bechstein in Berlin:

“Very Dear Sir, Accept a seven-octaved chromatic scale of thanks for your kindness in sending your magnificent piano for the Grand Ducal Hofgartnerei in Weimar. I hope you will on some occasion allow me to have the pleasure of convincing you, de visu et audaitu, how glorious the instrument looks and sounds here.”

Even in Liszt's day, piano makers commonly providing leading composers with their best instruments – which was excel-

lent advertising. This grand piano, which Liszt used at the end of his life, dates from 1881. It can still be played today and has a wonderful sound – as you can hear yourself: You can almost see the playful movements of bright sparkling water in front of you. Franz Liszt was 66 when he composed this late masterpiece named after the different sounds of the fountains in the Villa d'Este in Tivoli. He composed most of his highly regarded major works during his FIRST period in Weimar. Later on, he did not find composing quite as easy. As he noted in a letter to a friend, the French composer Camille Saint-Saëns:

“No one more than myself feels the disproportion in my compositions between the good-will and the effective result. Yet I go on writing—not without fatigue—from inner necessity and old habit. We are not forbidden to aspire towards higher things: it is the attainment of our end which remains the note of interrogation ...”

Frequently, it was not the master who sat here at the piano, but one of his pupils – since Liszt devoted a large part of his time to teaching. To find out how Liszt's lessons filled this esteemed salon with life, just key in 68.



Word soon got round that the *Maestro* himself would be teaching in Weimar during the summer. Budding virtuosos from all over the world streamed to Weimar – up to arriving in just one season. Three afternoons a week, a group of young men and a few women met here in the *Hofgärtnererei* house. Liszt used a progressive form of group teaching, later to become common as ‘master classes’. He did not assign his students tasks. Instead, each of them prepared what they wanted to play. When they arrived for the lesson, they then put their sheet music on the round table. Carl Lachmund, an American student, recalled:

“[...] He usually first went to the table, glanced over the music that had been deposited there, and selected some piece, preferably one that was not hackneyed, or one he thought might prove of particular interest to the class.”

The entire group then learnt from the way Liszt worked with the particular student on this piece. This was not about technical skills – Liszt’s students were expected to

be technically accomplished already. Instead, the lessons here focused on interpretation, expression, and grasping the essence of a piece. Liszt’s Russian student Alexander Siloti noted:

“Liszt did not give lessons as one normally imagined it. As a rule, he sat beside or stood opposite the pupil playing and indicated by his facial expression the nuances he wanted to have brought into the music. [...] No one else could show musical phrases as he did, merely by the expression of his face.”

The lessons were free. Liszt enjoyed fostering young talent and many became successful pianists. He also took a personal interest in their lives. They were rather like a large family for a time. On Sundays, when Liszt invited his guests to his popular matinees, his students had a chance to display their talents to an audience. When the Russian composer Alexander Borodin visited Liszt in Weimar in 1877, he reported:

“The men mostly stood. The ladies sat, wearing hats and holding parasols. The distinguished gentlemen, including the Grand Duke, were dressed in black frock coats, holding their hats, and with a small cane that never left their hands.”

You might have been wondering why there are so many places to sit down here – but when Liszt was living here, they could never have been enough.

652: Study



In his quiet hours, Franz Liszt often sat at his desk – the place where he not only wrote his many letters to a wide and widespread circle of friends, but also composed some of his later works. Today, the top of the desk is decorated by the death mask of the composer Liszt admired most – Ludwig van Beethoven. This world-famous composer is even easier to recognise from the portrait behind you to the left of the window. Liszt started playing Beethoven's work early in life. When Liszt was just 11 years old, they briefly met in person. Nearly twenty years later, Liszt wrote in the preface to his piano transcriptions of Beethoven's symphonies: „The name of Beethoven is sacred in art.“ In many ways, Franz Liszt kept the memory of his great role model alive. Throughout his life, Liszt, one of the most visionary and creative musicians of his day, applied his own skills and reputation

to support contemporary music. He promoted modern composers – above all, Hector Berlioz and Richard Wagner, who also belonged of his circle of friends. He performed their works and wrote articles to explain what he called their ‘music of the future’ in journals and magazines. Next to Beethoven's portrait, there's a relief portrait of the Grand Duke Carl Alexander - who was also a major influence in Liszt's life. The matching portrait of Grand Duchess Sophie, the Duke's wife, is on the wall diagonally opposite. Thanks to the Grand Duke, these rooms today give us a direct insight into Franz Liszt's later years. A few days after Liszt's death, the Grand Duke issued the following statement through his court chamberlain:

“Since [...] it can be assumed that Liszt's innumerable friends and admirers [...] will pay homage to the memory of the departed by visiting the rooms which he lived in, the Grand Duke strictly commands that nothing may be changed of the furniture and decorations, that is to the furnishings in the broadest sense, in the rooms in which Liszt lived. “

The Liszt Museum was quickly inaugurated, just one year later. To find out what so connected the Grand Duke and Liszt, just key in 69.



Franz Liszt first permanently settled in Weimar in 1848 to take up the position of court Kapellmeister. At that time, Liszt and the Grand Duke both shared the same vision. They wanted to launch a new cultural golden age in Weimar – the ‘homeland of the ideal’, as Liszt called it. This was to be a golden age of music – echoing the great movement of Weimar Classicism with the writings of Goethe, Schiller, Wieland or Herder some fifty years before around 1800. To create this new cultural era, the Grand Duke provided the finances and Liszt supplied a highly contemporary musical programme. In fact, through premieres such as Wagner’s *Lohengrin*, or smaller festivals including the two Berlioz weeks, Liszt managed to give Weimar an international profile once again. Grand Duke Carl Alexander and Liszt also became friends. Their friend-

ship even continued after Liszt left Weimar – as you can tell, for example, from the bronze model of Wartburg Castle on the display case behind the chaise longue. Liszt received this valuable piece, complete with its personal dedication from Carl Alexander on the back, in commemoration of Wartburg Castle’s anniversary in 1867 and the completion of its total refurbishment. Liszt lent the festivities to mark the event an added brilliance by the performance of his oratorio “The Legend of St. Elisabeth”. The prayer book with an ivory relief two shelves below is another gift presented to Liszt in his honour - this time from a Hungarian Archbishop. The handwritten dedication reads: „*In memory of the Graner Cathedral Consecration Mass.*“ Liszt composed this *Missa Solemnis*, his first oratorio, in 1855. Liszt’s metronome and his glasses, essential since his eyesight deteriorated early in his life, are below the prayer book. The photo shows Privy Councillor Carl Gille, a good friend of Liszt’s from Jena, a town not far from Weimar. Liszt and his students took enjoyable excursions to visit the ‘Academic Concerts’ organised by Gille. If Gille visited Liszt here in the Hofgärtnerei house, Liszt insisted on giving up his bed and, even at his advanced age, slept on the chaise longue here in the salon.

653: Bedroom

In his bedroom, Franz Liszt could recover from what were often very eventful days. The room is furnished exactly as it was during Liszt's lifetime – including the bed and night-table, and the washing table with the jug, washing bowl and other utensils. Even the ticking of the bronze clock was the same in Liszt's day. This small, pragmatically furnished room seems to have offered everything Liszt needed. When Liszt was over 70, August Stradal was both a student and his personal secretary – and often accompanied Liszt on his journeys. Stradal recalled:

“It is noticeable how he is content with great simplicity where his own person is concerned. [...] His homes everywhere are most modest, without any luxury [...]. When he travels, he always takes second-class, never ordering half a railway carriage for himself so he can travel alone, and choosing simple rooms in hotels. “

You may already have noticed that there's no wardrobe here. Liszt banished it to the little half-landing in front of the salon.

Apparently, he was far more concerned about a safe place to keep his musical scores, letters and manuscripts – THEY filled the large glass-fronted cupboard opposite the chest of drawers. The only decoration here is the picture over his bed showing the wedding of Saint Elisabeth with Ludwig IV, Landgrave of Thuringia. Liszt seems to have been especially drawn to the charitable Saint Elisabeth. She lived at the Wartburg Castle in the 13th century and – just like Liszt – originally came from Hungary. This oil print is based on a work by Moritz von Schwind, an Austrian artist. The image was, more or less, a by-product of another artwork. In 1854, Grand Duke Carl Alexander commissioned von Schwind to decorate the Wartburg with a cycle of pictures on the life of Saint Elisabeth – and those murals inspired Liszt to compose an oratorio on the same theme. Liszt probably had far quieter nights in his house here than in the Altenburg, his first Weimar residence. Would you like to know what might have kept him awake in those days? To find out, just key in 70.



The first time Franz Liszt lived in Weimar, he stayed here thirteen years – from 1848 to 1861. This was a very exhausting period in Liszt’s life, yet also incredibly productive for him as a composer. During these years, he even created a new genre in music – his ‘symphonic poems’, orchestral pieces translating the key idea and theme of a literary work into music. Through these compositions, he became the founder of what was known as the ‘New German School’ of music. And Weimar benefited too. Liszt’s presence and his pioneering musical programme ushered in a new cultural golden age in this small royal capital. But although the Duke supported Liszt as best as he could, the court orchestra remained a long way

behind Liszt’s aspirations as its musical director. Liszt had two ambitious projects to strengthen Weimar’s position in the long term – and was bitterly disappointed when both failed. First, he envisaged a national ‘Goethe Foundation’ showcasing and awarding prizes to contemporary works from literature, sculpture, painting and music in a changing annual rhythm. AND he wanted to construct a festival concert hall built especially for Richard Wagner’s tetralogy *The Ring of the Nibelung* - a plan that came very close to locating the Wagner festival in Weimar and not Bayreuth. When he was 49, shortly before he left Weimar, Liszt put his feeling of dependency into words:

“At a certain time [...] I dreamed of a new era of the arts for Weimar, [...] where Wagner and I would have been the key figures, just as Goethe and Schiller were once. Small-mindedness [...], all kinds of envy and stupidity from outside and inside have put paid to the realisation of this dream.”

But then why did he return? He asked – and answered - the same question himself 22 years later:

“Why am I in Weimar? Was it inopportune, a mistake or stupidity? Perhaps all three! Nonetheless, I’ve now felt at home in Weimar for more than thirty years. In terms of music, works, teaching and publishing, this is the focal point of my activities in Germany.”

654: Dining Room

We do not know how this room looked exactly during Liszt's lifetime. While the bedroom and salon were left in their original condition, soon after Liszt's death the Grand Duke turned the dining room into an exhibition space. Even in those days, as now, it displayed the numerous gifts presented to Liszt in his honour. The table and chairs here come from Liszt's Altenburg house. During his first stay in Weimar, Liszt had lived in the grand Altenburg villa together with Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein and her daughter Marie. Today, the Altenburg villa houses the Franz Liszt Centre, part of the Liszt School of Music – which is also named after this famous composer and pianist. Liszt and Princess Carolyne kept an open house where artists and intellectuals from near and far met and engaged in a lively exchange of views. The regular visitors not only included such musicians as Richard Wagner and Johannes Brahms, and the writers Friedrich Hebbel and Bet-

tina von Arnim, but also architects such as Gottfried Semper, the sculptor Ernst Rietschel and the scientist and scholar Alexander von Humboldt. However, the majority of the conservative Weimar residents did not drop by to pay their respects – THEY criticised Liszt's demanding 'music of the future' just as much as his relationship to a married woman whose husband did not want the marriage to be dissolved. Liszt's last years in the *Hofgärtnererei* house here were less tempestuous. By then, his relationship with Carolyne was one of platonic companionship. His old and new friends often came by, and many of his musical evenings ended with his guests joining Liszt for dinner and staying on to play whist. The artist Friedrich Preller, a friend from Weimar, was also an occasional guest. Preller painted the two large pictures here in the room. Take a closer look at 'Ulysses with the Sirens' near the window – and key in 71 to find out more about it.



As Preller's painting shows, the seductive singing of the Sirens failed to draw Ulysses to his death – but only because his men had tied him to the mast and blocked their own ears with wax. The painting on the wall opposite – 'Leucothea throws Ulysses her veil' is also part of Preller's Ulysses cycle. Grand Duke Carl Alexander liked them so much that he commissioned Preller to produce the total of 16 works as large format murals for the grand-ducal museum – today's Neues Museum.

The entire series is on show there in what is known as the 'Preller Gallery'. Liszt already knew Preller from his first stay in Weimar. In those days, Preller advised Princess Carolyne on buying art works. By the way, Preller's studio was then located here in the rooms of the Hofgärtnerei house – which later became Liszt's home. Liszt was also personal friends with the painters of the two portraits next to the doors to the salon. The oil painting by Ary Scheffer and the little watercolour by Josef Kriehuber show Liszt when he was 27 years old – shortly before Liszt's extensive concert tours created a frenzy of enthusiasm across Europe. Previously, Liszt had spent some years living in Paris. The virtuoso pianist was a welcome guest in the many Parisian salons. There, he not only got to know the renowned writers, painters and musicians of his age, but, in 1832, also met his great love, Countess Marie d'Agoult. They were a couple for nearly 10 years – even though their relationship did not exclude smaller affairs. After all, Franz Liszt was an exceptionally good-looking man and strongly charismatic – a combination which not only made him very attractive to women, but also drew many artists to him as well. That combination of good looks and charisma may well have turned Liszt into the 19th century figure whose portrait was painted most. To find out more, just key in 72.

The little watercolour shows Liszt wearing the fancy braided short-coat known as the ‘attila’ – part of the official uniform of the Hussars in Hungary, the country where Liszt was born. The portrait dates from 1838. It was painted in Vienna when Liszt was giving a series of charity concerts for flood disaster victims in Pest where the Danube had overflowed its banks. This portrait is a rare individual piece. In contrast, the two other Liszt sketches by Kriehuber from the same time were reproduced as etchings and sold as fast as they were printed. From Vienna, Liszt wrote to Marie d’Agoult:

“50 copies of my portrait were sold in 24 hours - but I trust you will not insult me by imagining that this has the slightest impression on me?”

The oil portrait by Ary Scheffer and many other Liszt portraits were also widely distributed as prints as well. This room dis-

plays some of the many gifts presented to Liszt in his honour from all across Europe – an indication of just how immensely popular he was. For example, the display case behind you contains batons – right at the top – recalling the many concerts Liszt brilliantly conducted, while the meerschaum pipes – at the bottom – tell us he was a keen smoker. Carl Alexander’s mother, Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna, had also been a great admirer of Liszt – as we know from the gold bronze and malachite table clock on the little table to the left. She also gave him the other clock of exquisite Sèvres porcelain behind you by the window. Carl Alexander himself presented Franz Liszt with the golden chamberlain’s key decorated with a little pearl on display underneath. The rank of chamberlain, normally reserved for persons of noble birth, provided easy access to the court. In making Liszt a chamberlain, Grand Duke Carl Alexander expressed his deep respect for this virtuoso musician

655: Servant's Room

Originally, this room belonged to Liszt's valet. Later, it was used by the series of early 'curators' who looked after the Liszt Museum and its collection. The room was only turned into an additional exhibition room in the 1950s. Liszt's silent travel piano is on the little wooden table in front of the window. With this instrument, he could practice when he travelled. Mind you, he might not have needed to use it that much on his endless journeys by coach since he was famous for his ability to play pieces unprepared from sheet music. And Liszt's playing also seems to have been unaffected by whether the grand piano provided for him had a light or heavy touch. Often, he only had time to hasten directly from the coach to the concert hall. In 1840, Robert Schumann wrote to his wife-to-be Clara.

"Can you believe that at his concert he played on a Härtel piano which he had never seen before. A thing like that pleases me more than a little, this confidence in his good ten fingers."

During his restless years of virtuoso concerts between 1838 and 1847, Liszt travelled the length and breadth of Europe, from one phenomenal success to the next. The German writer Heinrich Heine called

the audiences' enthusiastic reaction nothing less than 'Lisztomania' – and it reached its zenith in 1841 to 1842 in Berlin, where Liszt also captivated the German novelist Bettina von Arnim. She painted the inventively designed watercolour on the right next to the window. The little Cupids are playing Liszt a Hungarian 'three cheers!' – 'El Jen'. Bettina von Arnim wrote:

"Whatever it may be that touches me in you, it awakens a desire to make something better of myself. [...] The days have poured over me like fruitful rain. [...] And I can thank listening to your music for it."

The marble bust at the window shows Franz Liszt when he was 27 years old, shortly BEFORE he started touring. This portrait bust was made in Florence in autumn 1838 by the Italian sculptor Lorenzo Bartolini. Liszt was staying there for some months with his partner Marie d'Agoult. This was also around the time when their relationship came to an end, but the Countess was and remained the mother of their three children. Blandine and Daniel died young. Their daughter Cosima, though, lived to be 93 years old. Her choice of husbands always affected her father – and to find out why, just key in 73.

73: 2nd level: 655



When you compare Liszt's portrait bust with that of his daughter Cosima at the other end of the room, it is hard not to see a certain likeness. Cosima was married twice – and both times to musicians with a special relationship to her father. Hans von Bülow, Cosima's first husband, was an outstanding pianist and conductor – and Liszt's most famous student. Von Bülow remained lifetime friends with Liszt, who once wrote to Bülow's mother:

"I think of myself as his father - and the way it is today, it will also be in 10 years time. "

Perhaps this was one reason why Liszt fell out with Cosima after 1864 when she first became Wagner's lover and later his wife. At the same time, Liszt's friendship to Wagner was put on hold for some years. Liszt and Wagner were roughly the same age and had known each other since the 1840s. Liszt gained international renown

much sooner than Wagner, and supported his friend as best as he could. As Liszt wrote:

"If I had to write a book on Wagner, I should gladly take for an epigraph this remark of Victor Hugo's about Shakespeare: —I admire everything—I admire like a brute."

Wagner frequently expressed his thanks for Liszt's support. In 1876, at a major festive banquet in Bayreuth, long after they had become reconciled again, Wagner did not spare his praise for his friend:

"Here is the man who was the first to repose that faith in me, at a time when I was unknown, and without whom you might perhaps today not have heard a note of mine – my dear friend Franz Liszt!"

A year later, Wagner sent Liszt the libretto of *Parsifal*, which had just been published, and included a personal dedication. You can see the libretto in the display case next to the door. Franz Liszt's LAST journey also took him to Bayreuth where, after Wagner's death, Cosima organised the Wagner festival. It was also in Bayreuth that Liszt, the 'king of the pianists', died on 31 July 1886. Liszt is also buried there – and not in Weimar, Rome or Budapest – the stations of his '*Vie trifurqué*' as he himself called the threepart existence of the last 20 years of his life.