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MUSICIANS OF EUROPE

Nation states in Europe have existed for merely 100 to 150 years; yet, their search for identity, which has often been full of conflicts ever since their birth, often overshadows the fact that the roots of Europe's common cultural identity are much older than these nation states. If you're searching for the many centuries old but still alive traditions of this cultural community, don't waste your time: They are all there in the scores on the sheet music stands.

For almost two years, we have watched daily the cutthroat discussions in Westminster about how the United Kingdom would be part of Europe politically and economically in the coming years. However, in the world of music, the question of 'British or European' has been pointless ever since Georg Friedrich Händel. Perhaps the most important iconic figure of English music history, the composer of the *Messiah* was born on German soil and composed his works in the Italian style all his life, which was not a problem for anyone in the 18th century. Just as it was natural that the Thuringian genius, Johann Sebastian Bach, of the same age composed French suites and Italian concertos along with German cantatas and passions and even a Catholic mass, since he was a Lutheran church musician.

Even before the Baroque, musical life did not respect the ever-changing boundaries of countries or the linguistic barriers. There are various examples from the Renaissance – and with respect to church music, even from the Gregorian era. And although this is true for fine arts and many other cultural-scientific fields as well, music is perhaps the strongest adhesive of the people of Europe, reaching over borders, denominations and reigns. It is important to understand that this is not a sign of lacking cultural diversity but rather the continuous interaction of the many various trends, competitions and the natural mobility of musicians. And as with every race, there are sometimes winners: The Italian opera conquered Europe as much as the French ballet later or Flemish painting earlier. Even though until recently – and who knows until when – Europe has not been peaceful or united, it has always stayed culturally permeable, inclusive and curious, in spite of the bloody wars disguised as politics or religion. The cultural fights driven by the forced self-justified desires of the newly born nation-states only made the lives of artists miserable from the mid 19th century until now. Accepting cultural diversity has been the natural standard from the British Isles to St. Petersburg.

There are many examples for musicians always on the move, living comfortably all around Europe. Mozart is one of the most famous examples, but we can also mention Bálint Bakfark, who is less known, although the Brasov-born lute artist was one of the most celebrated musicians of the Renaissance, travelling all around all of 16th century Europe, from Lyon to Vilnius. Yet, there is one musician whose life is perhaps the best example for the cultural connotations of Europe. What's more, he lived exactly at the time of the birth and the first wars of the nation-states: Ferenc – Franz in German, François in French, Francesco in Italian – Liszt.

Ferenc Liszt was born in the small village of Doborja in Austria (today, Raiding) to an Austrian mother and a Hungarian father. His cultural identity may have been primarily French, since he spent most of his youth in Paris. Regarding language, Liszt preferred French so much that he even wrote his letters to his Austrian mother in French, who arrived in Paris with her teenage son and stayed there until her death. When Liszt was asked, he consistently declared himself as Hungarian, despite the fact that he first returned to his country in 1839 and never learned Hungarian to a good degree. But at the same time, he remained a Hungarian citizen throughout his life and travelled with a Hungarian passport. All his children, including Wagner's later wife, Cosima, were also Hungarian citizens. And he travelled a lot. There was hardly any place in Europe, from Lisbon to St. Petersburg, where Liszt had not put his name down with at least one concert. He was in his 20s when he became a teacher in the newly founded Geneva Conservatory. 40 years later, he was one of the founders of the Budapest Academy of Music, later named after him. Between these two, many students went to visit him in Vienna, Weimar and Rome. His single opera – which he wrote in his very young years – is in French, but he wrote songs for poems in four languages (German, French, Italian, English), alongside Hungarian rhapsodies, and even one in Spanish.

However, if you ask music historians, you will see Liszt viewed primarily as a German person due to the creatively fruitful decade he spent in Weimar, his significant influence on Wagner and, above all, due to the fact that a full generation of German musicians emerged from Liszt's cloak – from Hans von Bülow, founder of Berlin Philharmonic (who was also the first husband of Cosima Liszt), to Emil Sauer. Italy's influence was also significant: from the juvenile Dante sonata to the years spent in Rome and the late pieces inspired by Villa d'Este, not to forget the concert Liszt gave in Milan, which is deemed as the first solo concert of music history. He also became one of the leaders of the *Zukunftsmusik* movement, the initiator and one of the main sponsors

of Beethoven's statue in Bonn and an icon of German culture in the 1860s, at the same time as Napoleon III awarded him with the medal of honor. The Prussian-French conflict, which resulted in a bloody war in 1870, touched Liszt personally. In 1857, his younger daughter, Blandine, married a French lawyer, Émile Ollivier. Blandine died five years later, but Ollivier was already Prime Minister of France at the outbreak of the Prussian-French War of 1870.

Of course, not all brilliant composers were travelling world citizens. For example, Schubert never travelled more than a few hundred kilometers from Vienna, and the significant musical writer Schumann, same age as Liszt and born in 1810, barely left the German-speaking area. Born next to Warsaw in 1810, Chopin also went to Paris at a young age – after a detour to Vienna – and then lived there until his death. The next big pianist composer, Igacy Jan Paderewski – born half a century later – was already a star in the age of railway and steamers. He travelled around not only in Europe but also spent years in California and even reached Oceania. His influence on Europe was not merely as an artistic icon; being a wealthy, influential musician, he was a major supporter of the American-Polish expeditionary army and a member of the Polish National Committee during the First World War. Later, in 1919, he became the first prime minister of the again independent Poland. (An entire article would not be enough to sum up Paderewski's exciting life.)

There are very few adjectives that would be bigger insults to live and vivid music as calling the music of Bach and Mozart as 'classic'. (The poor composers could even suffer the languages – Hungarian included – that label their brilliant works as 'serious music'.) Luckily, the music of the past centuries is still alive and casting its effects across concert halls and music schools. The message of encouragement from European musicians – travel freely, reaching over reigns, languages and borders – is perhaps more important today than ever.