



# *The Romantics*

*Musical drama from real life by Christian Lanciai (2015)*

*The characters:*

Hector Berlioz  
Franz Liszt  
Gioacchino Rossini  
Alexandre Dumas  
George Sand  
Frederic Chopin  
Felix Mendelssohn  
Victor Hugo  
Alfred de Musset  
Marie d'Agoult  
Kalkbrenner, music critic  
Robert Schumann

a servant girl  
Clara Schumann  
Richard Wagner  
Johannes Brahms  
Hans von Bülow

The stage is Paris, Weimar, Düsseldorf and Rome from the 1830s to 30 years later.

Act I scene 1. Count d'Agoult's salon in Paris.

*Berlioz* I have never heard the like of it!  
*Liszt* I don't think any of us has.  
*Rossini* Who is this splendid talent?  
*Dumas* I know exactly who he is. I have heard him before.  
*Rossini* Well, who is he then?  
*Dumas* He is French.  
*Liszt* He is not French at all, for he is Polish.  
*Berlioz* Yes, he is about as much a Pole as you are Hungarian.  
*Liszt* He is a Pole in his very soul, like I am Hungarian in my soul.  
*Dumas* And it's only the soul that counts.  
*Liszt* Of course. That's all we have.  
*Dumas* What does maestro Gioacchino say to that?  
*Rossini* He says, that the soul is important enough, but all that really matters is what we are eating. Our talented Pole does not appear to have eaten anything for years.  
*Liszt* That's also why he is ailing.  
*Dumas* Is he sick? How?  
*Liszt* The lungs. I don't know how sick he is, but maybe he is just generally oversensitive.  
*Sand* What you are saying about him is just getting more exciting all the time. Couldn't you introduce us?  
*Liszt* I would love to, but he is not for you.  
*Sand* Why not?  
*Liszt* He insists on chastity.  
*Sand (laughs)* Is that supposed to be funny?  
*Liszt* It's no joke.  
*Sand* You don't mean to say, that he is a virgin bachelor?  
*Liszt* That's exactly what he is, in spite of a number of engagements.  
*Sand* So he never got all the way to the bed.  
*Liszt* No, he never got all the way to the bed.  
*Berlioz* That sounds more and more like a most extraordinary situation. We must get to know him.

*Liszt* Of course. Here he is now. (*Chopin enters the company.*)

*Rossini* A divine performance, maestro! My sincerest and most generous compliments!

*Chopin* Thanks, maestro. Those are warm words from the foremost opera composer.

*Rossini* Forget it. Nowadays I spend all my time slowing down.

*Chopin* You shouldn't. Music is an obligation, once you have it.

*Rossini* Of course, but I probably burdened the audience more than enough already.

*Berlioz* But who comes here, if not my dearest friend conductor!

*Mendelssohn* (*enters*) Says you, you old scarecrow amateur!

*Berlioz* Amateur, he says! Who only complimented you!

*Mendelssohn* Don't you try! You only tried to master me, but you never could, no matter how hard you tried!

*Berlioz* Because you are such a hopeless case, my dear Felix, completely blocked from all new innovations!

*Mendelssohn* Not at all! But music only exists to be pure!

*Liszt* Is there no purity in Berlioz?

*Mendelssohn* Never! If you only touch his hand you will have to wash your hands ever after! Just a glance into any of his scores, and you are contaminated and damaged for life by his impurities!

*Berlioz* He is only joking, Franz. We always pulled each other's legs.

*Liszt* I sincerely hope so.

*Mendelssohn* My own Frederic Chopin! How lovely to see you again! (*comes up and shakes hands with him*)

*Chopin* The pleasure is all on my part, Felix Mendelssohn, since we are all amateurs in comparison with you.

*Mendelssohn* Listen to him! Just because you confined yourself only to the piano, you are no less a master, but the greatest master of the piano of all.

*Chopin* What about Franz Liszt then?

*Mendelssohn* But he just keeps playing all his pianos until they break. In comparison he is just a butcher, while you know the art of caressing a piano to make it sing and present the purest water.

*Liszt* That is true. Chopin is more capable of making any piano sing than I.

*Berlioz* What about that, Gioacchino? Are we as opera masters in the shadow of these who can make dead instruments sing?

*Rossini* We can't compare with them, dear Hector. We play in different divisions. We break forth with mammoth choruses and elephant primadonnas, but they can produce the simplest and most beautiful songs without words just by their mere touch in pianissimo.

*Chopin* You please to flatter us, maestro.

*Rossini* That is as true a pleasure to me as to hear you play.

*Chopin* Still I know one who sang better than all of us.

*Liszt* Whom are you thinking of?

*Mendelssohn* I think I know who. The lyrical opera master above all others who could turn the opera as intimate as Chopin's most tender piano nocturnes.

*Liszt* Who could that be? Is he gone?

*Mendelssohn* Vincenzo Bellini, of course!

*Chopin (moved)* He was the highest angel of all of us. You could listen to his melodies forever, for they had the special quality of never reaching an end. (*dries a tear*)

*Mendelssohn* He was Chopin's best friend.

*Rossini* Chopin is right. He was the most outstanding of all of us, and then he had to die the first and the youngest of us all.

*Mendelssohn* You never know when you have to die. It could happen to anyone of us and suddenly.

*Liszt* Not as long as I live.

*Rossini* You are robust, Franz Liszt. You could survive us all.

*Liszt* I don't think any of us is in any immediate danger. We all have our music and art to live for. There is no better elixir of life.

*Chopin* But art has extreme demands. I will never outgrow my stage fright and agony of performing.

*Berlioz* Those are the devils we all suffer from who never leave us in peace. I expect every new first night of an opera by me to be a new execution, since that's what most of them always have been.

*Liszt* Yet you are still alive.

*Berlioz* That's certainly no fault of mine. I survived myself from the beginning and entirely against my own will.

*Sand* It's never easy to be a genius.

*Liszt* It must be even harder for a woman. How do you manage?

*Sand* I would never have made it without my men.

*Liszt* How many of them did you actually have?

*Sand* As many as your women.

*Liszt* I would think though yours to be more difficult to count.

*Sand* Don't try to make me believe you are a virgin.

*Liszt* I never did. But I am more innocent than you think.

*Sand* No one is more innocent than anyone thinks, for no one is innocent, and all are less innocent than they seem.

*Liszt* Spoken by a lady of experience.

*Sand* There is nothing wrong in knowing the men. But honestly, Franz, you are no virgin, are you?

*Liszt* Whatever do you think of me!

*Sand* Only the worst, like of all men, for it is unfortunately always true.

*Liszt* Surely you know all about my only great unhappy love affair?

*Sand* That girl Carlyne, the daughter of that minister, who refused to let you have her?

*Liszt* The mother had nothing against it and and implored her husband to let me have their daughter before she died.

*Sand* Some bad luck.

*Liszt* We really did love each other.

*Sand* But you never went all the way. That does not count.

*Liszt* The first love is the greatest and the only serious one.

*Sand* Then I am still expecting it, but honestly I don't believe in it.

*Liszt* What you have missed in life! And still you are regarded as more than well experienced!

*Sand* You are a dreamer, Franz. You will never grow into a man.

*Liszt* I think it's worse than that. Like all my brothers here, Chopin, Mendelssohn and Berlioz, I am a romantic.

*Sand* So a dreamer. Yes, you are dreamers all of you. Nothing will ever become of you.

*Liszt* Don't tell me you prefer regularity.

*Sand* You need regularity as a base for unlimited self-indulgence.

*Berlioz* Beware of her, Franz. She is dangerous.

*Liszt* Not to me. We know each other and understand each other. That's why we will never come together.

*Berlioz* You had better for your own safety.

*Dumas* Are you then completely resistant to ladies, you the most dashing of all our salon lions?

*Liszt* I never said that.

*Rossini* Don't you know that our young angel Liszt is religious and a saint? He could never fall for any lady.

*Dumas (surprised, to Liszt)* Is that true>?

*Rossini* He still wants to become a priest and will not give in until he is consecrated.

*Dumas (even more surprised)* Is that true?

*Hugo (has just arrived)* Don't let them provoke you, Franz. Rossini always wants to make fun of all innocent victims.

*Liszt* But it is true. I never wanted to be a musician. I wanted to be a priest.

*Rossini* Forget it, my good man. You can never do for the church what you are doing for music. The church already has its cathedrals, but you may construct more spiritual ones.

*Hugo* There is something to what he says. Surely you are not serious in wanting to be a priest?

*Liszt* Why not? I always loved the church. I love its mysticism and intriguing atmosphere of immortal legends. I was always more soft on the church than on music.

*Berlioz* He broke his father's heart by wanting to become a priest.

*Liszt* That's an exaggeration. He refused to allow me that calling. I had to give concerts instead and make money for the family. He demanded that I should work instead of studying. But I can make amends for it now.

*Berlioz* When your father is gone?

*Liszt* Don't you think I missed him? Do you think I was happy to get rid of him? He did everything for me! He sacrificed himself for my education, and without him I would have become no more than a village fool like everyone else in that small outskirts in no man's land between Austria, Hungary and Slovakia.

*Berlioz* It is true. I can testify to that Franz grieved for an entire year after his departure, in which time he did nothing else but just mourned.

*Liszt* It is true.

*Dumas* But now you are free to recover and can start studying. But you haven't resumed clerical ambitions, have you? Perhaps you will be a writer instead?

*Liszt* Never. There are too many others. In this room only we have more poets than composers.

*Berlioz* The composers are more unique. You stick to composing, Franz Liszt, for you will never be of any other use.

*Liszt* I don't think so either, Hector.

*Chopin* The composer's profession is the noblest of all crafts, for no art is more purifying than music.

*Mendelssohn* The master of masters of purity has spoken.

*Hugo* What do you say, George Sand? How does poetry stand against music?

*Sand* They are best combined.

*Hugo* Of course, but which art is higher by itself?

*Sand* You should be able to answer that, Victor Hugo, who is the one of us who is best at both prose and poetry.

*Hugo* I am at a loss. That's why I have asked you.

*Dumas* Music is more abstract. Literature is more concrete.

*Rossini* Of course, and one prefers the one, another the other. I myself think though that music has greater demands on the creator.

*Mendelssohn* How?

*Rossini* Just because it is more abstract but still enters deeper into the human heart with the immediate movement of its emotional strings.

*Sand* You are right, maestro Rossini.

*Rossini* I am grateful for the acknowledgement by a poetess. It is of great weight.

*Dumas* I can agree that music is a higher discipline, makes higher artistic demands, has stricter forms and reaches a higher level of sensitivity, but literature is freer, and imagination must prefer literature to music.

*Hugo* Why?

*Dumas* Just because music lacks the concrete dimension, unless it's an opera. The author may freely work with all reality, but the musician is exiled to his castles in the air.

*Hugo* There is something in it.

*Berlioz* That's why I stick to the opera, which combines both.

*Liszt* And you are right in doing so.

*Berlioz* When will you write an opera?

*Liszt* Never. I am too spiritual. I am only interested in the abstract aspects of music.

*Dumas* Like he said, there are too many poets already, they constantly grow more numerous and worse, while at the same time they keep writing constantly larger and heavier novels.

*Rossini* So we are lucky to have made the right choice as composers.

*Mendelssohn* Do you share Liszt's opinion, Chopin? Will you also never write an opera?

*Chopin* Never in my life. Operas are preposterous in their pompous absurdity, where reality is depicted completely deformed. I prefer poetry in literature, like I am also exclusively interested in the lyrical element of music.

*Liszt* We salute you, Frederic. You show us the way.

*Chopin* Which way?

*Mendelssohn* The way of purity, poetry and the musical development. I fully agree with the opinion of Franz.

*Chopin* Still Franz plays much better than I.

*Liszt* Not at all. I am a butcher in comparison. I am notorious among the instrumental dealers of Paris as the one who shatters their instruments by playing on them. You with your soft touch have never ruined any instrument.

*Chopin* I could never appreciate the German school of beating the instruments. If you don't caress them, there will never be any enjoyable music.

*Mendelssohn* You mean, that the softer you play, the more musical the music.

*Chopin* Something like that.

*Liszt* That's why you always play pianissimo.

*Chopin* Not always, but I always try to soothe the touch, since it is all too easy to let yourself be carried away. The fact is, that the softer the touch, and the more pianissimo you play, the easier it is to play exactly right.

*Mendelssohn* Do you agree with that, Franz?

*Liszt* There is something in it. I am always being carried away with myself. I am too passionate and can never restrain myself, while Chopin is in absolute self control on the piano.

*Sand* That's why his music is so irresistibly attractive.

*Liszt* Are you trying to seduce him?

*Sand* I don't think Frdederic Chopin can be seduced by flattery.

*Liszt* I don't think he can be seduced at all.

*Chopin* I need no seduction. I am already seduced from the start by life, and I always remained faithful to those I fell in love with. In contrast to most of you in this decadent and morally liberated Paris, I always stuck to my one and only true love.

*Liszt* But isn't your engagement broken off since long.

*Chopin* Only because her parents demanded it. I was obliged to be obedient to the best and the will of all.

*Mendelssohn* Chopin is the only paragon of virtue among us.

*Chopin* No, Felix, you are as well.

*Mendelssohn* Not at all. I am happily married, so I need not bother about morals or love crushes any more. I am safely landed on dry land. I am sorry, my friends, but unlike all of you I am settled and need no deviations.

*Sand* For free and true love there exist no deviations.

*Berlioz* What is a deviation? I have to make Geoge Sand right. Life exists for you to make it right, and if you just stick to the line of your own conscience, there are neither deviations nor morals, since everything quite naturally comes out right.

*Mendelssohn* What do you think of that, Franz, who are such a pious Catholic?

*Liszt* I believe Hector full well knows what he is talking about.

*Berlioz* I am almost the oldest of you, so I if anyone should have experience.

*Rossini* Personally I am doubtful about marriage. It's just a convention. To me marriage is an artificial institution which has to result in one part sooner or later deceiving the other.

*Dumas* Do you speak of your own experience?

*Rossini* No, that of others.

*Berlioz* Will you then never marry, Franz?

*Liszt* I can't say that I am in any needs of it. On the contrary, I was warned by my father on his deathbed to have anything to do with womern.

*Sand* That's because you are so good-looking. Fatherly jealousy, so typical among men.

*Liszt* No, I think he was serious.

*Berlioz* What woman would then be a danger to you?

*Liszt* I don't think such a woman exists.

*Dumas* That's what you say now. The one who makes the greatest resistance against women becomes their first victim.

*Berlioz* But Franz Liszt intends to become a priest.

*Dumas* Even worse.

*Sand* In any case, you need not be afraid of me.

*Liszt* We know each other. And you are almost even like a man at that.

*Sand* Thanks. And you are almost like a woman.

*Liszt* No, I'll never be like that.

*Berlioz* He is romantic but not effeminate. Then our soft Chopin is more womanly in his extreme sensitivity, and that's why he if anyone would need a woman.

*Chopin* I only succeeded in making myself guilty of unhappy love affairs.

*Sand* So then there would be time at last for the contrary?

*Chopin* Is that supposed to be an invitation?

*Liszt* Beware of her, Frederic. Too many have been burnt by her.



*Sand* To someone like Chopin I am completely harmless, for I love him already.

*Liszt* Even worse.

*Hugo* My good noble Frederic Chopin, don't take any risks with George Sand. No woman is as loved and hated as she is, and she knows all the most dangerous tricks of the art of love. She knows its opportunistic ways, that's how she became a baroness by marriage, only for the sake of the title, for the man was an idiot, whom she deceived as fast as she could, while her worst and most ardent lover was the poor Alfred de Musset, who will hate her for life.

*Chopin (to George Sand)* What have you done to deserve such a controversial reputation?

*Sand* Nothing. Only the men keep doing it. The women just always become the victims.

*Liszt* But you have to admit that you turned your every love liaison to your advantage.

*Sand* Is then Alfred de Musset's irreconcilable hatred an advantage? No, my good Franz, it's a martyr's halo.

*Chopin* You have my sympathy, George Sand. I can't believe anything bad about you.

*Sand* I can assure you, that I would only be good to you.



*Dumas* Here she goes for him.

*Liszt* And why do you think you could warrant that, when you have done so much evil to some?

*Sand* I know it, because Frederic Chopin has a natural capacity for only bringing out the best in man.

*Chopin* That was a kind thing to say.

*Sand* I mean it.

*Hugo* I wonder what Alfred de Musset would say to such an assertion.

*Dumas* Here he is now.

*Sand* No, anything, but not that barbarian!

*Musset* I hear you, madame Sand! Your curse is my vocation! Your abhorrence of me can but tempt me to your side when you least of all would desire it!

*Sand* Who let that ruffian in?

*Musset* I entered all by myself and obviously in the last moment to save your next victim from being caught under your so called love's guillotine. I can see you intend to devour Chopin like everyone else.

*Sand* Throw him out!

*Musset* Thanks, I will not stay longer than I will find time to say some actual truths. You are a devourer of men and a vampire, and I warrant you, Frederic Chopin, that you if you make any deal with that creature, she will be as much the destruction and death of you as she has been to all the others.

*Chopin* It pleases you to exaggerate. Your gross insulting of her obliges me to stand up for her defence.

*Liszt* Don't get yourself mixed up in the affairs of Alfred and George Sand, Frederic.

*Musset* We have no relationship! We never had any! It has been the contrary if anything, for there is no one who could have a relationship with her! If she engages in a love relationship it will only be to deceive the man in question or to execute him, in most cases both. As a woman she is nothing but a deadly parasite on love.

*Hugo* You shouldn't have come here, Alfred.

*Musset* But she summoned me by her hatred!

*Sand* I never hated you. It was only you who hated me and for no reason.

*Musset* She even blames me, that bitch without a conscience!

*Hugo* You had better leave now, Alfred, before someone challenges you to a duel.

*Musset* Whoever! Just come on!

*Sand* He is drunk.

*Musset* True, or else I would never have dared to risk my life by coming near you again, but now I happen to be here and must avail myself of the opportunity to insult you as much as I possibly could!

*Dumas* Don't take him seriously. He is just playacting as a comedian.

*Chopin* Madame George Sand, or baroness, may I have the honour of escorting you out of this unpleasantness? (*offers his arm*)

*Sand* My cavalier, you are welcome. (*accepts his arm and rises to walk out with him*)

*Musset* Frederic Chopin, her using you will be the death of you!

*Sand* No, I will love him, for a compensation for all the unhappy love he so far unjustly had to suffer, and that will be my final honour.

*Chopin* Madame baroness, let's withdraw from all baseness.

*Sand* Find yourself someone else to hate, Alfred de Musset. I am busy. (*walks out with Chopin*)

*Berlioz* What about that, Franz? Did she really succeed in seducing him, or was it just natural for him to fall for her?

*Liszt* Don't worry. No one can seduce Chopin, and he couldn't fall for anyone, not even for George Sand.

*Berlioz* Are you suggesting that she is capable of a Platonic engagement?

*Liszt* She is capable of anything, but she will never be able to win Chopin's heart.

*Berlioz* How so? Is it already taken?

*Liszt* Yes. Chopin's heart belongs to Poland.

*Berlioz* Well, Alfred, now you won't have to be angry with George Sand any longer, since she is gone with Chopin.

*Musset* She will kill him, like she killed all the others.

*Berlioz* But evidently she hasn't killed you.

*Musset* No, just my soul. That's what she kills in her men, and then there is nothing left of them.

*Hugo* Don't take it so seriously, Alfred. If you should take everything that women do for serious, there would be nothing left of the men.

*Musset* That's what I mean. They would all implode. I will not implode but live to get my rightful revenge.

*Hugo* And how will you get it? Do you intend to murder her?

*Musset* Worse than that. I intend to execute her in my poems.

*Hugo* Then you are the one who is indulging in executing souls.

*Musset* And by all rights! But she has no right and is still doing it!

*Hugo (to Dumas)* A hopeless case. There is nothing we can do about his wretched condition.

*Musset* Just you wait until you yourself are deceived by your wife! Then you will learn about a life of eternal exile!

*Berlioz* But lo, here at last is the countess d'Agoult! Now at last we will have a welcome reason to discuss another matter.

*Liszt (rises and greets her by kissing her hand)* We have been expecting you, countess.

*Marie* As usual I was detained having troubles with my hopeless husband.

*Berlioz* What has he been up to now?

*Marie* Just all the ordinary fuss.

*Berlioz* Jealousy?

*Marie* What else?

*Berlioz* For some reason?

*Marie* Of course. Even if jealousy is not always for some visible reason, it is always an infallible instinct.

*Hugo* It wasn't in the case of Othello.

*Marie* That was an entirely different story. There a villain used the mechanisms of jealousy for an instrument to bring about the downfall of the Moor. And so infallible is jealousy in its singular blindness, that the intrigue could not fail.

*Berlioz* You seem to know all about that matter, Madame.

*Marie* I am married to jealousy itself.

*Musset* How then can he endure all your lovers?

*Marie* That's what he can't. That's why I haven't got any.

*Musset* How is it possible, Madame? Such an irresistibly young and beautiful woman like you, and married to such a deplorably boring old man for a useless dummy?

*Marie* You insult my children with him, Sir.

*Musset* And how can you be sure they are *his* children?

*Marie* They couldn't legally be anyone else's.

*Hugo* Don't provoke her, Alfred. She is above all suspicion.

*Musset* Don't you try it. No woman is. There was never any woman who was not fallen from the beginning. She was only made for that reason, to become man's curse and burden.

*Hugo (to Marie)* Don't take him seriously. He has happened to George Sand.

*Marie* I know. That excuses everything.

*Musset* Shall we make a bet? Before this evening has passed, I bet that you have given yourself over to another man than your scrapped husband.

*Marie* Your insolence is only obscured by your absurdity.

*Musset* No, Madame, I always stick only to the truth.

*Liszt* What is truth? I challenge you, Alfred de Musset. As the fool you are you are blinded by the misery of your unhappy love which has turned you obsessed by your own selfishness, which you aggrandize by your dramatized bitterness.

*Hugo* Bravo, Franz Liszt! A perfect hit!

*Musset* And what do you know about love, Franz Liszt, who are only intimate with the piano as your only instrument of masturbation?

*Dumas* Now he is going for him as well. He knows no limits.

*Hugo* Let him go on. No matter what limits he violates he is harmless.

*Dumas* But he is constantly hitting under the belt.

*Liszt* Don't mix sex up with music, my dear poet.

*Musset* And what is music then if not an outlet for the shortcomings of sex?

*Berlioz* To Liszt music is a religion.

*Musset* Let him defend his lewd vanity himself.

*Liszt* No, Hector, music is not my religion. My religion is the Catholic Church, and sooner or later I will abandon music to become a priest. That was my intention already as a young man, but my father forbade me, and I obeyed him, since that's the first duty of a Catholic to obey his father.

*Berlioz* And what is music then to you?

*Liszt* A vocation. A talent demanding obligations. I would not have been born a musical wonder child if there was no meaning of it. I was created to fulfil a mission, which I consider my duty to develop piano music into something that would benefit all humanity by its uplifting inspirational quality to enoble the human mind.

*Berlioz* A definition as good as any. Such an exultation you cannot debase, Alfred de Musset.

*Musset* He has not encountered reality yet. Just you wait. I don't think he could ever become a priest, unless he insists on going through with his life's self-deceit.

*Dumas* Pardon me, colleague, but your insolence is actually not acceptable.

*Musset* I know, because I am only telling the truth, which is never acceptable.

*Liszt* Let the poor jilted poet rave. I can only deplore him and pity him.

*Musset* You naïve romantics are the ones to be pitied, who can't realize how pathetic you are in your doomed naïvety.

*Liszt* You insult love.

*Musset* No, I only scorn it and all poor devils who fall down in it.

*Liszt* That's even worse.

*Musset* No, it's even better.

*Mendelssohn* Stop quarrelling now, poor cocks. You will end up nowhere.

*Musset* That's why we quarrel. All quarrels are just a way to get nowhere, which is why we love quarrelling, for then when don't have to get anywhere.

*Berlioz* You are just fooling around.

*Musset* Nothing is as serious as a joke.

*Berlioz* Do you mean that I should take it seriously?

*Musset* You should never take anything seriously that is seriously meant.

*Hugo* Leave him be, Hector. He is just crazy and wants to call for attention.

*Musset* Isn't that what we all are? Why are we artists? Why do we wish to excel each other? Why does Franz Liszt spend ten hours each day at tormenting himself at the piano just to turn the ladies into hysterics? Why do we all make pretenses if not to call everyone's attention to our shameless vanity?

*Dumas* There is something in what he says. We are all astronomically in love with our own vanity.

*Rossini* Speak for yourself. If there is anything I lack it is vanity in my extremely serious art of cooking, the highest, noblest, most useful and most necessary of all arts.

*Liszt* You should still have carried on writing operas.

*Rossini* No need. You write much heavier operas for the piano.

*Mendelssohn* Try stop chattering some time. It will only end up in blood, sweat and tears and irreconcilable hostility forever on the part of someone.

*Musset* No danger, Felix. They are all used to me and hardened against everything.

*Liszt* No ladies could ever be hardened against your attacks on them.

*Musset* That's another matter. The ladies exist to be attacked by men.

*Marie* Only by those to whom we are married. They have legal allowance. No one else has.

*Musset* Consequently you are only assaulted by those who are not married to you, for your married ones are all incapacitated by routines that wore them out. They have tired of attacking you, so there are only all the others left.

*Liszt* Stop it now, Alfred. We don't want to see our ladies in tears.

*Musset* Do you think they are capable of crying? George Sand has never cried. Has the countess d'Agoult ever been crying? No, because she never had any reason.

*Liszt* Do you insist on giving her a reason?

*Musset* I wish I could.

*Marie* My role as hostess forbids me to drive you out, Alfred de Musset, since I and my husband live for favouring the noble arts, which you in spite of all represent, but you are actually making my presence in the same room as you unendurable.

*Musset* I thank you for that. Then there is no need for my retirement. There is nothing hindering you from removing yourself.

*Berlioz* What insolence!

*Musset* It's just because her husband isn't here to defend her, since he doesn't care about her, but it doesn't matter, since she doesn't give damn about him either.

*Hugo* Alfred, at least try to make an effort at some decency.

*Musset* Who can be decent in the company of ladies?

*Marie (in tears)* He is right. My husband would never care to defend me, not even against Alfred de Musset.

*Liszt* This is going too far. You have moved her to tears, Alfred.

*Musset* By my lovesick poetry? What an honour!

*Liszt* In the absence of her husband I am obliged to relieve her of your company, Alfred, for this will not do any more.

*Musset* That's right! Relieve her of her husband, and that will make her happy!

*Liszt* Come, countess. This is not to be tolerated.

*Marie* Always when my best friends come here my husband goes into hiding or leaves the house. He always leaves me alone with those he imagines makes approaches to me but who just keep insulting me.

*Liszt* I never insulted you.

*Musset* The worst insult against her is her husband.

*Liszt* Come, Marie. You will never again have to listen to the insults of Alfred de Musset.

*Marie* Are you taking me away from here?

*Liszt* Yes, I am taking you away from here.

*Musset* Relieve her of her boorish husband and of the failures of her children and give her that life of decency she so far always was deprived and deceived of. You can do it, Franz Liszt.

*Liszt* I would love to try.

*Marie* Are you serious?

*Liszt* I am always serious, Come! (*escorts her out*)

*Musset (triumphant)* What did I say! Liszt has taken her over! Now we will never see her husband again, and we will probably neither see her nor Liszt any more either! He is doing the only right thing. He has abducted her!

*Dumas (to Hugo)* It actually seems as if Alfred would have been right after all.

*Hugo* He always gets his right against all, since he is the most insolent of all.

*Rossini* Whom will we now enjoy listening to when both our master pianists have left each one with his woman?

*Berlioz* Felix, it's your turn now. Play something decent for a change, so that we may purify ourselves after all these scandals.

*Mendelssohn (sits down at the piano)* There is only one music of absolute purity, and that is Chopin.

(*He spontaneously starts on Chopin's third etude. The others forget everything else and sink down into beautiful dreams.*)

## Act II scene 1. Chopin's home.

(*You see a closed bedchamber door and some sounds from behind it.*)

*Chopin (comes home and listens, stands still in thoughts for a while and then goes directly for the bedchamber door, opens it resolutely and takes Franz Liszt and Marie d'Agoult by surprise in bed.)*

*Chopin* I am disappointed, Franz Liszt.

*Liszt* But you did lend your apartment.

*Chopin* Not for such purposes.

*Liszt* But you knew I was with Marie d'Agoult.

*Chopin* Yes, I knew that you had seduced her to adultery against her husband, but that did not give you any licence to drag your adultery into my bed.

*Liszt* I do apologize. We needed somewhere to be left in peace for sure. Your place is very strategically positioned and guarantees a sanctuary.

*Chopin* Have you then no sense of decency, Franz Liszt? Don't you see under whose portraits you used my sanctuary and home for debauchery?

*Liszt* Are they some kind of relations?

*Chopin* They are my parents!

*Marie* I apologize sincerely on both my own and Franz' behalf. I think it was somewhat inconsiderate of you, Franz, to use Chopin's hospitality.

*Liszt* I hope this will not come between us, Frederic.

*Chopin* It already has come irretrievably between us. I will never again be able to regard you as a serious man.

*Marie* I dare say!  
*Liszt* Don't be narrow-minded, Frederic. We are leaving. You won't be seeing us for some time. Then when you have got over it and forgotten it, we can play together four-handed again.  
*Chopin* Never again. It is finished, Franz Liszt.  
*Liszt* Don't forget everything I did for you. I was established here in Paris when you arrived, and I helped you to reach the same level as I.  
*Chopin* I will not forget it, but neither will I forget your violation of my home.  
*Liszt* Surely it wasn't such a bloody crime.  
*Chopin* You couldn't have done anything worse than to demonstrate your fornication under the eyes of my parents!  
*Liszt (to Marie, despondently)* He is a puritan.  
*Chopin* No, Franz Liszt, I am just trying to be decent, which I now have reasons to believe you will never succeed in becoming even if you really would try.  
*Marie* Let us leave. He will get over it.  
*Liszt* We are leaving, Frederic. Thanks for your hospitality while it lasted. I will not expose you any more to the unpleasantness of my friendship until you have forgiven me.  
*Chopin* It is best that way.  
*Liszt* Come, Marie. We are finished here. *(They have dressed and leave the place.)*  
*Chopin (sits down on the bed in despair)* My best friend, and the one I admired most of all! My hero and benefactor! And then he abuses my home! No, I cannot forgive him such a downfall. I might never be well again as long as I live, but he will never be honourable again as long as he lives, which is worse.

## Scene 2. Nohant.

*Chopin* I can't stand him.  
*Sand* You will have to tolerate him.  
*Chopin* No one can force me to.  
*Sand* You can control yourself and refuse to show your feelings.  
*Chopin* You mean be a hypocrite, like everyone else?  
*Sand* There is a risk that also Alfred de Musset might come.  
*Chopin* In that case we are saved.  
*Sand* Or the contrary – he only lives for sinking people.  
*Chopin* But that's what most people deserve.  
*Sand* Not I.  
*Chopin* Are you sure?  
*Sand* Here they are now. Try to keep it up. – Welcome, Marie d'Agoult and Franz Liszt!  
*Liszt (kisses her hand)* Once more time we all meet again.  
*Marie* Don't put it on.



*Liszt* No one will ever find reason to accuse me of impoliteness.

*Sand* Politeness is all what you consist of, Franz Liszt.

*Liszt* At least that's my intention.

*Kalkbrenner* What is politeness? The art of putting it on.

*Liszt* At least you admit it is an art.

*Kalkbrenner* Yes, just as hypocrisy is an art of concealing the truth.

*Liszt* What is truth?

*Kalkbrenner* That you are a conceited poseur who together with Hector Berlioz wants to deceive the world by trying to make it believe your technical effects are unique.

*Liszt* Berlioz is a genius.

*Kalkbrenner* He only claims it himself. All the others despise him.

*Liszt (to George Sand)* What is such a fellow doing here?

*Sand* Don't start arguing now at once, gentlemen. You are all welcome as long as you don't fight.

*Chopin* Try to accept some criticism, Franz.

*Liszt* Do you call it criticism, when he will just write anything with the intention of just insulting me?

*Kalkbrenner* I only write the truth.

*Liszt* No, you only write of envy to drag down all higher beings down to your amateur level of meanness!

*Kalkbrenner* So you are a higher kind of being than ordinary mortal people?

*Liszt* Music is sacred!

*Kalkbrenner* Yes, as long as it is music. When it claims to be music without being musical it is as unholy as all true music is holy.

*Liszt (to George Sand)* I can't remain under the same roof as this man.

*Sand* Then challenge him to a duel.

*Liszt (to Marie)* Come, Marie, let's leave. There is nothing for us here.

*Marie* Would we then have gone so far for nothing? No, Franz, I want to stay here and meet our friends.

*Liszt* Do you force me to leave without you?

*Kalkbrenner* Apart from your qualifications as an amateur, I could never believe you also were a coward.

*Chopin* Don't give up without fighting, Franz. Kalkbrenner has challenged you. Stand up for the defence of music.

*Liszt* You don't defend yourself against provocations. You ignore them.

*Kalkbrenner* My dear colleague, I am the first one to admire you for your superior technique, but technical superiority alone is not music.

*Liszt* I have placed technique at the service of music in an effort to develop the soul of music.

*Kalkbrenner* And thereby only succeeded in complicating it.

*Sand (takes Franz under his arm)* Don't mind him, Franz. He is just teasing you, and you are weak if you allow yourself to be teased. *(wants to walk out with him)*

*Marie (pushes Liszt away from her)* And what right do you have to make claims on him? Isn't it enough for you to have enslaved Chopin?

*Sand (drops Liszt)* Sister, this is unworthy of you. If I have enslaved Chopin, you have enslaved Liszt.

*Marie* No, I saved him from being enslaved by you.

*Liszt (to Chopin)* What shall we do with our poor ladies? We can't just desert them.

*Chopin* Blame yourself, Franz. Marie will never let you go. *(pulls out)*

*Sand* There, now you have scared Chopin away by your quarrelsomeness. He can't stand conflicts.

*Liszt* It's your fault who invited that Kalkbrenner.

*Kalkbrenner* No, I came here all by myself.

*Marie* Will you not then go out to comfort your poor Chopin, when he became so upset? Or are you getting tired of nursing him? Have you got tired of the fact that he can't give you any more children?

*Sand* I could never tire of him nor of his music. The two children I have already are quite enough.

*Marie* So you still think he could give you some sexual feedback.

*Liszt* Stop it now, Marie.

*Sand* Don't you believe that you will be able to keep Franz Liszt, Marie, no matter how hard you will try to bind him to you by getting as many children as possible with him.

*Marie* Don't you try to contaminate me with the accomplishments of your professional black arts of vampyrism!

*Sand* Behold her anger! So I struck right!

*Marie* I think it is time for us to leave, Franz, to never have anything more to do with this dragon!

*Sand* I see you through, Marie, but you could never see through me, like Chopin sees through Franz Liszt while Franz Liszt never could understand Chopin.

*Kalkbrenner* Chopin is all music, but Liszt is all just technique. Why didn't you go for priesthood, Franz Liszt, which was your original intention? There your hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness would have made better than as a masked parasitism on music.

*Liszt* Come, Marie. You are right. We are finished here. *(takes Marie's hand and walks out with her)*

*Sand (waves them farewell)* Welcome back!

*Kalkbrenner* My dear Madame George Sand, do you think we now at last could tempt Chopin to play for us?

*Sand* There is a risk that the calm will not last for long, before Alfred de Musset turns up.

*Kalkbrenner* Just let him turn up. Liszt is gone, and it was only his superiority that could bring out poisonous remarks. *(They enter together.)*

Scene 3. A bistro in Paris.

*Mendelssohn, Schumann and Berlioz enter dressed up as tramps and take their seats at a table, putting it on and making their orders of drinks.)*

*Schumann* Are you certain he will come here?

*Mendelssohn* You may be sure. The point is that we got here before him.

*Berlioz* Now we will give him the damn!

*Schumann* There is a risk he might recognize us.

*Mendelssohn* On the contrary! That's the point! He *shall* recognize us!

*Berlioz* But not immediately.

*Mendelssohn* Precisely! Not immediately.

*Berlioz* It's only from envy and snobbism that he has scourged us in the press. He is insufficient himself, and therefore he tries to make his colleagues appear equally insufficient.

*Mendelssohn* Still there is something to it, my dear Hector Berlioz, in Rossini's admiring words that you could accomplish anything but music.

*Berlioz* He has himself stopped composing and has no longer any say.

*Mendelssohn* Attention! Here he comes! Act now as the tramps you are!

*(enter Kalkbrenner taking possession of a table, ordering his drink, while the three musicians whisper together, make squibs by glances and gestures and giggle.)*

*Berlioz (finally, raises his glass to Kalkbrenner)* We are honoured, your grace.

*Kalkbrenner (disturbed, snorting in irritation)* Do I know you?

*Berlioz* You don't need to, since we have the honour of knowing you all too well.

*Kalkbrenner* And how could you know me? I don't associate with such decadent trash as you.

*Mendelssohn* Still you are writing about us most eloquently.

*Kalkbrenner* I never wrote a word about beggars and tramps. I only write about noble arts and music.

*Berlioz* Among other stuff very derogatory articles about our friend Franz Liszt. What do you really have against modern music?

*Kalkbrenner* And how could such as you know such a snob as Franz Liszt?

*Schumann* We just happen to know him.

*Berlioz* You have written even worse articles about Hector Berlioz. Allow me to introduce myself. *(removes his false beard and whig with his hat)*

*Kalkbrenner (terrified)* Hector Berlioz!

*Schumann (steps forth and bowing to him with his hat off)* And Robert Schumann. I love critics.

*Mendelssohn* We knew for certain that you had to know us poor tramps of beggars and trash.

*Berlioz* Admit that you actually tried to reduce us to that category by your derogatory articles.

*(Kalkbrenner (still terrified))* This is unworthy of you, gentlemen.

*Berlioz* Is it? And is it then worthy of you to make us appear as dilettants at making noise?

*Kalkbrenner* I never wrote a disparaging word about Mendelssohn.

*Schumann* But the more so of Berlioz and Franz Liszt.

*Kalkbrenner* Pardon me, gentlemen, but I don't know you. (*breaks it up suddenly, fumbles and almost stumbles over his crashing table and disappears*)

*Schumann, Mendelssohn and Berlioz* (*almost laughing their sides off*)

*Schumann* He will never dare to write anything more about you.

*Berlioz* Now Liszt should have been here to watch his sad complexion!

*Mendelssohn* And Chopin. He would have expressed a well needed laughter for a change against his trials under George Sand.

*Sand* (*has entered unnoticed, dressed as a man*) What do you dare say about my Chopin?

*Mendelssohn* Baroness Dudevant! Please take a seat! You were the only one missing. We are just joking.

*Berlioz* We have just chased off the virtuoso critic Kalkbrenner by our pranks.

*Sand* I noticed it and was very much amused. (*takes a seat among them on a chair generously provided by Mendelssohn*)

*Schumann* How is our noblest friend Chopin after you tried to cure him out of his life on Mallorca?

*Sand* As usual. He just keeps on coughing, like he always did.

*Schumann* Franz Liszt suggests it is your fault.

*Sand* On the contrary. If anyone saved his life, it was I.

*Mendelssohn* Still he remains mortally sick.

*Sand* You can't blame me for that. He was born that way.

*Mendelssohn* We know, dear baroness. Of all the ladies he could have happened to, you are still the best.

*Schumann* And most famous.

*Sand* Thanks for that, Monsieur Schumann. I am doing what I can for him. You appear to be happily married yourself.

*Schumann* Like Mendelssohn. We are fortunate.

*Sand* But how is it really between Franz Liszt and Marie d'Agoult?

*Berlioz* You should know who brought them together.

*Sand* I certainly didn't. They seduced each other, and Franz Liszt abducted her all by himself.

*Berlioz* Are you sorry for that?

*Mendelssohn* Didn't Marie d'Agoult show you how to seduce Chopin so that you would leave Franz Liszt alone?

*Sand* You certainly jump to conclusions, Felix Mendelssohn. You are worse than the trash columnist Kalkbrenner.

*Schumann* He is actually the one who made this up about you. That's one of the reasons why we exposed him to our practical joke of the burlesque.

*Sand* How kind of you.

*Mendelssohn* We must compliment you however for having preferred Chopin to Liszt.

*Berlioz* And why is that a compliment?

*Mendelssohn* Everyone knows that Chopin is no good in bed while Liszt is the contrary.

*Sand* It was Chopin's music that seduced me. Liszt could seduce a Marie d'Agoult but not me and least of all by his erotic virtuosity.

*Schumann* Did he try?

*Sand* We understood each other too well to get too close, but Chopin needed someone to take care of him.

*Mendelssohn* I hope you will be able to prolong his life as long as possible.

*Schumann* We all hope so.

*Sand* Then gentlemen, we are agreed. (*raises her glass, and they drink to each other*)

### Act III scene 1.

*Marie* What's the matter with you, Franz? Don't you love me any more?

*Liszt* That's not the problem, but you are in the way of my work.

*Marie* How could I be? I never obstructed your work.

*Liszt* Then it is my own sensuality which tempts me to rather love you than my work, but that way I get nothing done!

*Marie* So I am to blame for your sensuality?

*Liszt* That you are a woman is bad enough.

*Marie* So I am to blame for you having seduced me for just being a woman?

*Liszt* It has cost me three children which has been devastating for my concentration and work capacity.

*Marie* You blame me for your three children? What kind of a hypocrite are you?

*Liszt* Don't call me a hypocrite. I wanted to be a priest long before I fell in love with any woman, and I still do.

*Marie* You are a sissy. You put it on for your audience of ladies, as if you got a kick out of turning them hysterical. And you will never manage without ladies and mistresses. You are done for, Franz Liszt, as a ladies' man, and that you let me and your children down will not help you in your so called work. You will just keep getting mixed up in constantly new skirts.

*Liszt* In that case it's you who have ruined me.

*Marie* No, you were lost from the beginning, like all men are, who refuse to take responsibility for their love affairs.

*Liszt* Don't you realize we could impossibly go on like heretofore?

*Marie* Yes, since you don't love me any more.

*Liszt* I certainly do! You will always be the greatest love of my life! No one will ever be able to replace you! You are and remain the mother of my only children! But I have to start thinking of my mission as a musician.

*Marie* You are a fool taking yourself too seriously.

*Liszt* No, my musicality and divine gift as a pianist compels me to redeem the world!

*Marie* By weird modern music sounding even worse than Berlioz?

*Liszt* Berlioz is a genius!

*Marie* Yes, like Rossini says, capable of doing anything but music.

*Liszt* Rossini is Rossini. No one can take him seriously any longer since he ceased composing.

*Marie* But his music is classically purer than anyone else's. He even beat Beethoven.

*Liszt* Only as a composer of comical operas. No one can beat Beethoven.

*Marie* Still he was totally beaten.

*Liszt* His deafness was not his fault.

*Marie* But being deaf his music ceased to sound well, and he was out.

*Liszt* You don't know what you are talking about.

*Marie* Neither do you when you talk about love although you intend to desert your wife and children.

*Liszt* I have to for the sake of music.

*Marie* That's what's wrong with your music. You are without love. You can only love yourself.

*Liszt* No, I love the entire world.

*Marie* You are a fool, Franz Liszt. I don't regret our love, but I deplore you.

*Liszt* Then leave me at last in peace!

*Marie* Yes. From now on you will have to masturbate alone. You will never succeed at arriving home into any woman. (*leaves*)

*Liszt* What does she mean? Will she for a revenge for my demission curse me with impotence? Well, without her I will at last be able to act at large as a concert pianist.

## Scene 2.

*Chopin* Do you have to nurse me to death?

*Sand* My dear, you are ill, and if anyone would and could nurse you it is I. You can't afford resisting being taken care of. Why make resistance? Don't you believe in me? What are my lacks and wants? As a tender mother of two children you couldn't have a better nurse than I.

*Chopin* But you are overdoing it! I never asked you to seduce me to Mallorca, where I just got sicker all the time, since the weather kept persecuting us...

*Sand* The bad weather was not my fault.

*Chopin* And your children just hate me, at least your son. As young as he is, his jealousy against me assumes such nasty expressions, that I would fain just vanish.

*Sand* You can't manage without me.

*Chopin* I am afraid that I must, since you are stifling me. If I remain with you it might very well become my death.

*Sand* You always rebuked me for my cares, while I only loved you and wished you well, as if you were allergic against me, but it is just pettiness and unwillingness to tolerate me for being what I am just because I am a woman.

*Chopin* You are both man and woman, while I as a sensitive man is more female than manly, but you never notice it when you overstep my feelings and transgress my soul.

*Sand* My poor corpse, what am I to do with you? You are more difficult than a spoiled child. I can't understand why I keep on living with you year after year although you never gave me any love. By all means, you only consist of love, but it stays with you and never reaches others, except by your unique music. I suppose that's the only reason why I could never give up my clinging to you. You are the only eternal life I have.

*Chopin* I am too vulnerable and sick in my soul because of the destiny I share with my afflicted homeland Poland. My destiny and that of Poland are united forever, and when Poland bleeds to death, which it is doing continuously under the Russians, I also must bleed to death.

*Sand* Your father was French.

*Chopin* But my mother was Polish. That ranks higher.

*Sand* Do what you like. I renounce my responsibility for you, if you think you could manage better independently, but I doubt it, and I will always worry about you.

*Chopin* Worrying is all you women are able to, thereby you constantly worry the men, and that way they are never left in peace.

*Sand* I will leave you in peace if you wish.

*Chopin* Then you will also be at peace with your hateful son and other lovers.

*Sand* That was not a decent thing to say.

*Chopin* Perhaps not, but it was probably unfortunately true.

*Sand* You know I have to favour my children ahead of you.

*Chopin* You are welcome. All I wanted was to do without them.

*Sand* You will never be happy, my poor living carcass. *(leaves)*

*Chopin (alone)* Don't you think I know it, Madame? I live only for my and Poland's misfortune, since I have nothing else to live for. *(walks over to the piano coughing miserably with heart-rending painfulness and starts to play the study in A minor opus 25 n.11 from the fifth bar.)*

*After a while the servant girl enters. She does not want to disturb but waits until Chopin becomes aware of her and interrupts himself.)*

*Chopin* What is it?

*Servant girl* Pardon me, but a gentleman is here to see you.

*Chopin* Who?

*Servant girl* A certain Mr. Robert Schumann.

*Chopin (at once)* Show him in at once! *(rises as Schumann enters)* My dear colleague, what news?

*Schumann* No, please sit down! *(takes a seat himself, moving his fingers across his brow)*

Whatever shall we do? Have you heard the news?

*Chopin* What news?

*Schumann* Felix Mendelssohn is dead.

*Chopin* Oh no! How is it possible?

*Schumann* He never recovered after his sister's sudden demise. He worshipped her above himself. He gave up and didn't want to live any more. Now he is gone.

*Chopin* The greatest genius of all of us!

*Schumann* Exactly. We can't manage without him. He was the leading star. What have we left? You and I and the hopeless experimentator Berlioz and the unbearably presumptuous Franz Liszt and Wagner.

*Chopin* Don't count on me. I will be next.

*Schumann* What do you mean?

*Chopin* Mendelssohn was in better health than I, who have always been mortally ill. You can't count on me any more. I have broken off with George Sand.

*Schumann* She doesn't count. She was only a burden on your music. She has ruined Franz Liszt and been a parasite on you. She has no bearing on music. But you are the foremost of all of us.

*Chopin* I am dying and have always been dying.

*Schumann* You are still alive, and we must live.

*Chopin* Whether we want or not? Is it that bad?

*Schumann* We carry the new music into the future. It's our responsibility. We are the ones who create it and show which way it has to go. We are its guides, and it is our responsibility to show the right way, when certain dominant bullies show the wrong one.

*Chopin* Whom are you thinking of? Berlioz and Franz Liszt?

*Schumann* Not only. Also Wagner.

*Chopin* I don't know him.

*Schumann* You should have been with us in Leipzig when we had Mendelssohn and Liszt together with us. Liszt made his usual exhibitions and acrobatics at the piano as if he regarded using the piano as a coition demanding all the reources of the body, and he dominated the evening so completely that Mendelssohn refused to entertain. Then Liszt insisted, and Mendelssohn finally accepted reluctantly and laughed and asked Liszt: "But you must promise not to get angry with me."

Felix then made a priceless performance by playing the very same piece as Liszt with all its improvisations and completely in the style of Liszt with all acrobatical theatrical exaggerations and gestures, so that he made a perfect caricature of Liszt with all his manners, making it impossible not to be full of laughter.



*Chopin* Wasn't Liszt wounded then in his vanity? He is so sensitive on that point.

*Schumann* Fortunately he took it easy and afterwards commended Mendelssohn and couldn't help admiring him for his mastership. You have to admit that no one invites to caricatures more than Liszt.

*Chopin* He appears to have left his wife and her three children.

*Schumann* They were never married. He appears now to be living with Lola Montez.

*Chopin* Who is that?

*Schumann* A notorious courtesan.

*Chopin* Poor Franz Liszt!

*Schumann* We are more to be pitied, who now will have to do without Mendelssohn. He did everything for us and for music. He was the last classic. He resurrected Bach from the dead and introduced the total orchestra. Music history has never had so much to thank for as by Mendelssohn.

*Chopin* He was even funny.

*Schumann* The funniest of all. It is as if all music history had suddenly reached an abrupt end. I could never replace him, nor could you. Least of all the adventurers Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner.

*Chopin* Try still to tolerate them. They can't just go on producing only anti-music.

*Schumann* Tolerating them as musicians is all right, but enduring them as humans is more difficult, Liszt with his overbearing manners and Wagner with his monstrous presumption. Berlioz is at least human with all his failures.

*Chopin (has a coughing fit)* Thanks for your visit, Robert Schumann. You were always my most sincere friend. I have to get some rest now.

*Schumann* You should in some respect still have something left of George Sand as a friend to take care of you?

*Chopin* Not any more.

*Schumann* Has she turned you down, when you are so ill?

*Chopin* No, I left her to get a chance to get well. I abandoned her for the sake of music, and she abandoned me for her children, who could not stand me. So we both abandoned each other.

*Schumann* You were lucky not to get any children.

*Chopin* No risk.

*Schumann* Farewell, brother. Take care. You are indispensable to music.

*Chopin* Only the music can cure me, while at the same time it consumes me.

*Schumann* The core dilemma and nightmare passion of every musician, which make them consume themselves by the fire of their passion; - the more they indulge in it, the faster it burns to consume them, the better, and the more they fan its glorious but self-destructive flames.

*Chopin* Thank you, Robert. Take care of your family.

*(Robert leaves. Chopin sits by the piano and continues his study where it was broken off.)*

Act IV scene 1. Weimar.

*Wagner* It is now up to us, colleague. I hope you will soon produce my operas.

*Liszt* As soon as I can, but we are not alone.

*Wagner* Who are you thinking of then? The old fogey Berlioz, who only produced failures all his life, who never was successful with any of his operas since they all were too difficult and complicated, and who never will accomplish anything better than his awkward Fantastic Symphony?

*Liszt* He is not counted out yet, and he is tough. But the world leader of music is now Robert Schumann.

*Wagner* His opera Genoveva is a poor failure, no drama, no originality, no melodies to speak of, nothing. He was finished when Mendelssohn suddenly turned in.

*Liszt* But his symphonies are excellent, his "Scenes from Faust" is better than Berlioz', and his piano music is second only to Chopin.

*Wagner* Chopin is gone, and when the sun is gone it will cast no shadow any more. The shadow called Robert Schumann needed suns like Mendelssohn and Chopin to be able to exist.

*Liszt* He is as far from finished as Berlioz.

*Wagner* But we are now the ones to have the initiative. My operas are the ones that count.

*Liszt* What about the Italians?

*Wagner* Bellini and Donizetti are gone. Rossini is just cooking. Their only follower is a certain Verdi, a clumsy piano stomper, who at best may stamp the rhythm. He should have been a circus orchestra leader. His music are just waltzes for the barrel organ.

*Liszt* But he has audiences, and his operas are successful like no one else's.

*Wagner* That's why I want you to stage mine.

*Liszt* Patience, my dear Wagner, patience! We are ahead of our time, but if we force the modern music we will only be thrown out. I would not like to lose my new base here in Weimar.

*Wagner* You are stuck with your new mistress.

*Liszt* We intend to get married.

*Wagner* Do you really think it will ever happen? Not even the pope is very prone to accept divorces.

*Liszt* She has only had an orthodox marriage.

*Wagner* Even worse. And her husband is still alive. How did you manage to get rid of that sticky and notorious adventuress Lola Montez?

*Liszt* She was a good mistress but nothing more. When I broke away from her I had to make my host promise not to let her out until twelve hours after my departure.

*Wagner* Did you lock her up?  
*Liszt* I had to.  
*Wagner* I will probably also never marry again. My first wife was one too many. My dream woman does not exist. I should find mistresses like you.  
*Liszt* The whole world is full of mistresses. It's just to pick your choice.  
*Wagner* Thanks for the advice. But I prefer those who are already married. They are more exciting.  
*Liszt* Love is no sport. You don't make love by risking it.  
*Wagner* That's why you never got rid of your mistresses. I prefer too have finished the last chapter before I embark on a new one. I am no collector.  
*Liszt* No, my dear Wagner, I am afraid you are a consumer.

## Scene 2.

*Clara* Try to bear with them for the sake of music.  
*Robert* Of course I can bear with them for the sake of music, which pardons and excuses everything. But Wagner transgresses the musical boundaries.  
*Clara* Then let him. What has that got to do with you? It's on his own responsibility.  
*Robert* It's his falsity that I can't bear with. And he has always distorted the mind of Liszt, who is willing to do anything for him.  
*Clara* That's even less any concern of yours. It's on Liszt's own responsibility, and if he commits any mistake it's his own fault, and he will have to take the consequences himself alone.  
*Robert* Well then, I will make a hard effort to control myself and keep it up. But if they cross any line I will have to react.  
*Clara* That will be on your own responsibility in that case.  
*Robert* Trample my toes if I go too far.  
*Clara* You can never go too far, Robert, as little as Mendelssohn could, nor Chopin for that part.  
*Robert* I miss them bitterly.  
*Clara* So do we all. Let's now entertain our guests. They must be wondering what has happened to us.  
*Robert* Come, my love. But if I can't stand their manners you will have to excuse me if I remove myself.  
*Clara* Of course. (*Robert takes her under her arm, and they return to their guests in the salon, which is completely dominated by Liszt and Wagner.*)  
*Wagner* There you are! We were wondering where you had gone. You have missed Franz Liszt's new Concert Study.  
*Clara* Thank you, it was heard well enough in the entire house.  
*Liszt* Clara, lovely Clara, we are waiting to hear you play for us.

*Clara* Dear Franz, the way you play no one else needs to play when you have played.

*Wagner* He enjoys hearing that.

*Liszt* Still I was inferior to the good Mendelssohn.

*Wagner* Don't you try it. No one could ever excel Franz Liszt.

*Liszt* Mendelssohn did.

*Wagner* I don't believe it. Anyway, he is dead now, so he can't do it any more.

*Schumann* How is it possible, Franz? I actually have to agree with Wagner. No one could excel Franz Liszt.

*Liszt* It was in the good old days in Paris. He and I contributed in the same salon. I had played all evening and at last wanted to give him a chance, so I insisted that he would play something, although he was very reluctant. Finally he gave in and laughed a little as lovably as only he could laugh and made me promise not to get angry with him. "Why should I?" I asked surprised, whereupon he sat down at the piano and played exactly the same piece as I just had been playing with almost exactly the same variations, while at the same time he imitated all my manners as a pianist so perfectly, that it was such an incredibly accomplished caricature of me, that I just had to laugh myself. I applauded him myself afterwards warmest of all.

*Wagner* You didn't. You could never forgive him that he made such a fool of you. I have myself heard how hard you found it to get over it.

*Robert* You were always envious of Felix, Richard, since he was the greatest master of all.

*Wagner* How could you say so? He never finished his compositions but constantly kept withdrawing them to overwork them. That's why they were never finished.

*Robert* On the contrary. That's why no works have ever reached closer to absolute perfection than his.

*Wagner* Why then was he never satisfied with them? He constantly kept finding new weak spots in them. When I have finished some composition, I leave it as it is in peace. Overwork only detracts a completed masterpiece.

*Robert* Do you mean to say it is better to leave it half finished?

*Wagner* We can't discuss music with you, Robert. You always feel affected personally. You are even more sensitive than Mendelssohn.

*Robert* Sensitivity is the very nerve of music. Without sensitivity there can be no music. Chopin knew that.

*Wagner* He is also dead and has no say any more.

*Robert* Do you suggest that deceased masters have no say just because they are deceased?

*Wagner* I mean that it is the living that count.

*Robert* Of course, but none of us living now reach the talent level of Mendelssohn, Beethoven or Handel.

*Wagner* Speak for yourself.

*Robert* I speak for Mendelssohn.

Wagner He is dead.

Robert No, he is alive.

Wagner (to Liszt, scornfully) Listen to him! He lives wholly in the past!

Robert While you are overrunning music history.

Wagner Music history exists to be run over. Or else there will be no more new music.

Robert The music already created in imperishable pricelessness is a heritage for us to administer and try to live up to. The already created ideals could only be surpassed if we continue building on them from where they were left at the departure of their masters.

Wagner Beethoven could create his new music by learning to break all the old laws.

Robert You can create your new music, but you will never be able to surpass Mendelssohn.

Wagner He created no opera, and your opera is a failure.

Robert You are going too far.

Liszt Take it easy, Richard.

Wagner I am just stating facts. Mendelssohn could not compose operas and Robert even less, which he has proved by making such cramped efforts.

Robert Mendelssohn was the last one who could compose anything!

Wagner Why didn't he compose any opera then?

Robert Because he had no time, since he died too early!

Liszt Don't get upset now.

Wagner Upset? Who is getting upset? He is the one who gets upset!

Clara Herr Wagner, you are forgetting that Robert is your host.

Wagner We are discussing music. Music stands above all social rules.

Robert But you are sullyng it!

Wagner What's the matter with you?

Robert Mendelssohn made music! But you are corrupting it!

Wagner (to Liszt) He is lost. He is not accountable. We can't have anything to do with him any more.

Liszt (rising) Pardon us, but I think it is time for us to leave.

Robert Yes, and herr Wagner is not welcome back!

Wagner (rising with Liszt) I haven't insulted Mendelssohn. I have only said that he couldn't compose operas.

Robert No, because he would not lower himself to such irrational superficialities just to make fortunes and broaden his vanity!

Wagner He is hopeless. (*leaves quickly with Liszt*)  
*(Several other guests also leave, and the soirée mood is completely ruined.)*

Clara (after they all have gone) I am afraid we can't have any more soirées.

Robert If only you had played something instead of Liszt!

Clara You know very well, that if Liszt is present, no one else can play in the same room.

Robert Forgive me. Did I go too far?

Clara The worst thing of all, Robert, was that you were perfectly right. Liszt and Wagner are really only good for showing off.

Robert (*laughs and embraces her*) Thanks, my beloved. You understand music better than any of us! (*they leave together with their arms around each other.*)

Scene 3. Schumann's house. The doorbell rings.

*The young Johannes Brahms (blond, rather long-haired and without beard) answers the door.*

Liszt (*at the door*) I am looking for Robert Schumann.

Brahms He is not at home.

Liszt Is Frau Schumann at home?

Brahms I am sorry, but she is not available.

Liszt Perhaps you don't know who I am.

Brahms Yes, I know exactly who you are. If you enter I will hear if Frau Schumann might see you. Was there anything in particular?

Liszt Yes, I had some business with Robert Schumann.

Brahms (*shows him in without another word, Liszt enters and notices there is a low tone in the house.*)

Liszt But I don't know you. Are you one of the young musical wards of the Schumanns?

Brahms I suppose you could say so.

Liszt Are you from the vicinity?

Brahms No, I am a Hamburger.

Liszt Wagner would find you a perfect sample of blond German youth.

Brahms I don't know Wagner. If you wait here I will hear about Frau Schumann. (*leaves*)

Liszt Could something have occurred? This house was always the most open of all, but now all doors seem to be shut. Does Clara hate me so much, that she doesn't want to see me if her husband is away? (*looks around with some concern and tries to weather any danger. Brahms returns.*)

Brahms Please have a seat. Frau Schumann will see you presently. She asked me to tell you meanwhile what has happened.

Liszt Has anything happened?

Brahms You sure could say so. This is under strictest confidence. You must not spread a word of it to anyone. Robert Schumann has tried to commit suicide by jumping into the Rhine. He was saved, but insisted on being interred at a hospital. That's where he is now. Therefore the house is in mourning, and I am here to support Clara Schumann with her seven children, who suddenly find themselves without a father.

Liszt (*prudently*) I heard about Robert Schumann's depressions but I had no idea it could go that far. Clara and her family naturally have my sincere compassion and all my sympathy. If I could be of any help, I would do anything.

*Brahms* Thank you, but that is for Clara to decide in that case. What was your message to Robert?

*Liszt* Just a dedication. He dedicated his great C major Fantasy to me. I just wanted to finally return the courtesy and try to renew our friendship.

*Brahms* I am afraid it is too late. Here is now Frau Clara. (*rises at once. Liszt immediately follows his example.*)

*Clara (all in black)* Franz Liszt, I never thought we would see you again.

*Liszt* Frau Clara, thanks for your generous kindness to receive me, especially under the prevailing circumstances, which I understand are unusually difficult. I have at last finished my greatest work for the piano, a Sonata in B minor, which I wished to dedicate to your husband and our friend Robert.

*Clara* Sit down, by all means. I am very grateful for your courtesy and kindness, so typical of you. You never wished to unfriend anyone, and still so many got angry with you.

*Liszt* Especially your husband.

*Clara* I know. It was mainly Herr Wagner that he had difficulties with. To Robert, Felix Mendelssohn was always the most sacred of all. To come here and denigrate Mendelssohn was the absolutely most tactless and foolish thing Herr Wagner could do. We decided to never forgive Wagner, and you unfortunately were of his party.

*Liszt* It can't be helped, but Wagner is a divine genius.

*Clara* If he is, he abuses it by being unhuman and ruthless and by cultivating even worse qualities.

*Liszt* He is impulsive and lacks self-control, which must be admitted, but you must have patience and forbear with geniuses.

*Clara* Just because they are geniuses? Is genius then an excuse for anything? Are then all means allowed just because you are marked as a genius? Pardon me, Franz Liszt, but being a human being imports first of all a responsibility to behave towards other people, especially if you presume to be a genius.

*Liszt* Well, let's not discuss it any further. Would it be possible to see your husband?

*Clara* Unfortunately not. His doctor forbids it, since Robert himself does not want to see anyone.

*Liszt* I am sorry. What are the prospects?

*Clara* The worst thinkable. There are no prospects. We have to take one day at a time.

*Liszt* Are not even you allowed to see him?

*Clara* Not yet.

*Liszt* Nor your young friend here?

*Clara* Johannes Brahms is a friend of the family.

*Liszt* Is this the Johannes Brahms, whom Robert has praised so generously?

*Clara* Yes, he is Johannes Brahms.

*Brahms (wants to rise)* Perhaps I had better leave.

*Clara* No, please remain. This might be the only occasion for you to meet Franz Liszt, and for once he appears without affectation.

*Liszt* You could never accept me as a pianist, Clara.

*Clara* Is it so strange? You are just manners. Music is something else than manners.

*Liszt* That's why I am no longer giving concerts.

*Clara* I must give you that acknowledgement, though, that you were and are the foremost.

*Liszt* But your husband was superior to me as a composer.

*Clara* Thanks for that. I wish he could hear it.

*Liszt* I ask you to convey it to him when possible.

*Clara* (*sighs, is suddenly tired and clasps her head*)

*Brahms* (*rising*) I think Frau Schumann is tired, Herr Liszt.

*Liszt* Perhaps I had better leave.

*Clara* (*controls herself, conceals that she has been fighting a crying fit*) No, please remain. But it is as Johannes says. I am tired and have to retire. There is so much for me to think about. Pardon me. (*Brahms wants to escort her out.*) No, please stay and converse with Liszt as long as he wishes to stay. He would surely wish to know more about the crisis. (*Goes out by herself*)

*Liszt* A most admirable woman.

*Brahms* The most admirable of all.

*Liszt* So neither you nor she may visit the patient?

*Brahms* Unfortunately such is the case, so far.

*Liszt* And the doctors offer no hope?

*Brahms* The doctors dissuade as long as he doesn't get better.

*Liszt* What a terrible tragedy! The worst of all! Neither dead nor living, but hospitalized and isolated from the world which was his kingdom! And no one noticed anything until it happened?

*Brahms* There had been signs. He had declined as a conductor, and the orchestra had asked for another leader.

*Liszt* Do you mean to say that he is finished as a musician?

*Brahms* Unfortunately that could actually be the case.

*Liszt* Then Clara is fortunate to have you.

*Brahms* I will only help her as long as it is needed. If there is a change that no longer demands my presence, I will return to my own activities. Naturally we all sincerely hope that Robert could return at least as our man.

*Liszt* Let's sincerely hope for that.

*Brahms* But since you are here now and have brought a sonata with you, which perhaps never has been performed, and you are in the house of Robert Schumann, so perhaps you would like to play it for us? That could perhaps solace Clara in her sore trial and grief?

*Liszt* My friend, it shall be a pleasure to perform it. But I must warn you: its musical language is not conventional.



*Brahms* I don't think it could be worse than Wagner. (*Liszt moves over to the piano, and Brahms sits down to listen. The scene dies, and you may not hear anything of the sonata.*)

Act V scene 1. Rome, ten years later, Liszt's humble apartment.

*Hans von Bülow (is shown in by a nun, sits down in a sofa and prepares to wait, somewhat worried)*

How will he take it? It's the supreme treason against all that we have lived for and our entire world, and it will strike his very own heart. Will he be able to take it? Am I doing right in coming here to brutally force him into the entire situation? Unfortunately I am doing the only right thing. It would be even worse if he learned it from others and not the whole truth.

*Liszt (in black priestly outfit with a cross hanging round his neck down across his breast)* My dear Hans von Bülow, what a singular pleasure to find you here! How is the family? How is my daughter? I sincerely hope nothing serious has happened, though I seem to discern some dark cloud across your brow.

*Hans* May I congratulate you on your final priesthood.

*Liszt* It took a lifetime of exertions. Yes, I finally succeeded in obtaining my consecration, my highest dream since boyhood, but it also cost a lifetime of sacrifice.

*Hans* I heard that your princess had left for home.

*Liszt* Yes, we no longer aspired for marriage.

*Hans* I am sorry. Was it the Holy Father who refused to allow exemption?

*Liszt* No, we actually finally obtained it, but not until I had already reached my priesthood as abbé, and then the dear Carolyne didn't want to proceed any further. She had been obliged to suffer too many years of waiting and longing which only resulted in repeated defeats, and when we finally reached our victory it was too late.

*Hans* I am sorry.

*Liszt* Perhaps that was the happiest way. Now I may concentrate on religion in peace, and I might perhaps finally find that peace as a cure for my passions.

*Hans* They always obstructed your music.

*Liszt* And my religion.

*Hans* Isn't that the same thing?

*Liszt* I wanted to become a priest from the start to get away from the constant concert strain. Music demanded too much of me. Now I have put music in the service of religion, hoping it will thereby become more a road to peace than to worries and anguish.

*Hans* You are and remain the world's greatest pianist and can never become anything else. Music is above and more than religion.

*Liszt* That's what you say, and I accept it. But to me music is only vanity, and I want something higher.

*Hans* With your advanced high standards of morals I might perhaps then tell you why I am here. Cosima has left me.

*Liszt* How is it possible? Weren't you happily married?

*Hans* I thought so too. But she found another.

*Liszt* Unfaithfulness? Cosima? It must not be true!

*Hans* I reacted exactly in the same way but had to wake up to face the truth.

*Liszt* And what is the truth?

*Hans* That Richard Wagner has taken Cosima away from me.

*Liszt (completely like fallen down from the skies)* Richard Wagner?

*Hans* Yes, my dear maestro. He has deceived us. Precisely like he tried to deceive his benefactor the banker Wesendonck by trying to conquer his wife, which she was strong enough to resist, and like he ruthlessly used his benefactor and sponsor king Ludwig just to betray him and have him scandalized, he has now conquered and bereft me of my own wife, who is 24 years younger than himself, after all that I have done for him and for his music during all these years.

*Liszt* This must not be true.

*Hans* We have to face the truth. The truth is that we have nourished a monster at our bosom, who from the very beginning to the very end has been premeditatedly focussed on using everyone who by their influence could help him, first of all you, me and king Ludwig, just to further his own agenda, to at the reaching of his goals ruthlessly ignore and neglect the friendships of his abuse.

*Liszt* What will you do about it? Have you done anything? Obviously not, since you come to me.

*Hans* My first impulse was to challenge him to a duel for life or death. I found that the only proper thing to do.

*Liszt* Why didn't you do it? You would have had the right to kill him.

*Hans* I thought of the music. His "Tristan and Isolde", which I still had sacrificed everything for and so much time and work to get it produced, is still perhaps the most consummate music ever created. His genius saves him, even if he isn't worth it.

*Liszt* This is terrible. So the Schumanns were right.

*Hans* I have learned that you tried to visit them in connection with Robert Schumann's breakdown.

*Liszt* I arrived too late. He was already hospitalized. Nothing could save him, and after only two years his life came to an end, but his music is still the more alive, unlike my own.

*Hans* There is nothing wrong with your music.

*Liszt* When I played my sonata to Brahms, which I had dedicated to Robert Schumann, he fell asleep. You only fall asleep to boring music.

*Hans* Brahms is Brahms. He is an academician in music, while you like Wagner is an innovator.

*Liszt* Don't speak any more of Wagner. I never want to hear anything more about him. I hereby denounce both him and my only daughter. They are dead to me.

You must not do what he has done to music. If he steals my daughter from his best friend and benefactor, he is unworthy of serving the music.

*Hans* My own opinion exactly. Still nothing can stop him from going on harvesting laurels and marching from success to success.

*Liszt* What is that success worth that marches over corpses?

*Hans* That's not our problem. It is Wagner's problem.

*Liszt* You are right. He has made his hell himself, and we have no part in it. What grieves me most of all is that my own daughter has made herself part of it.

*Hans* I have got over the worst of it. I hope you will also. After all, you have both the music and the church to comfort you.

*Liszt (rising)* Thanks for your visit, Hans von Bülow. You did the right thing in coming to me. It would have been worse if I had learned it from other channels.

*Hans* That's why I came here.

*Liszt* How long will you remain in Rome?

*Hans* As long as you wish. I am at your service. I will be free the next days.

*Liszt* Then we must discuss the matter further. Now I have to be left alone to be able to find myself in this new situation, which was about the last thing in the world I would have dared to expect and which implies the most radical possible change for my personal part. In brief, this will be my life's most indigestible circumstance of forced imposition.

*Hans* I am glad you take it as a man without affliction.

*Liszt* You should be glad to not be able to see within me, which never again will be able to get out of my personal permanent anguish.

*Hans* Farewell, maestro. I will be back tomorrow.

*Liszt* Yes, please.

*(They shake hands in mutual but quiet respect and depart. After Bülow is gone, Liszt collapses in a sofa.)*

That villain! He has ruined everything! We built up the serious music to the holiest and most beautiful monument of all, and he has ruthlessly gone stamping and trampling it down and obviously just for his own reckless passions and ambitions. The holiness and purity of music will never be able to recover. And where does this leave me? An old pathetic aging dried out mummy of lost illusions. There is no love left any more, and all my struggles against Faust's temptations and Dante's hell were in vain. I have fought with Jacob's angel and believed myself coming out of it a victor and find myself knifed in the back by whom I considered my most faithful disciple. This is too much. And my daughter! Have I then fostered and loved you, my only daughter who made it among my children, just for you to fall for such an infernal opportunist, such a mean and ruthless careerist, such a monster of egoism? No, I can't take it. All my endeavors have been in vain. The world of music is lost, since its ideals have been trampled down into the mud. All that remains is to live for death until it liberates me from this mad life of just self-deceit, madness and the foolish and utterly empty vanity of the macabre folly of all human dreams. *(tries to collect himself and falls down praying on a footstool utterly crushed)* And the church? I finally came

home to it too, when all my life has been transformed into a hollow scorn against the massive hypocrisy of my vanity. Not even the church can save me from the abyss of the world's most successful life of nothing but failures. (*bends over in desperate prayer, and the scene is mercifully toned down in slowly increasing darkness.*)

*The End.*

*Gothenburg 16 April 2015,  
translated in Verona, April 2023.*

*Post Script*

All the scenes are principally taken from reality, even if they actually happened in other ways than what can be produced in a theatre. The lady whom Chopin surprised Franz Liszt with in his apartment was another one though than Marie d'Agoult. The three gentlemen who exposed the poor music critic Kalkbrenner to their joke were Mendelssohn, Chopin and Liszt. His visit to the Schumanns in the moment of his acute crisis never happened in reality, but he actually dedicated his great B minor Sonata, his last great piano composition, to Schumann, which complimentary gesture reached him too late, and Brahms actually fell asleep when Liszt played it for him on a later occasion. Hans von Bülow's visit is a construction but illustrates the actual situation.