



Franz Liszt was a Hungarian composer who lived during the Romantic period. He was born on October 22, 1811 and died July 31, 1886.

While Franz Liszt was a composer, conductor, critic and teacher, he was best known as a pianist. He was the first of the virtuoso performers. When Liszt walked onto the stage, he took over the hall, amazing the audience with his incredible technique and his awesome presence. He was a true showman and the man who invented the solo recital. Although some were annoyed by his personality, Liszt was one of the greatest pianists the world has ever known.

As a composer, Liszt, of course, wrote music primarily for the piano. He also transcribed popular orchestral works for this instrument. Many of his pieces are tremendously difficult and few pianists can perform them properly. Later in his life, he started writing music for the orchestra and composed wonderful melodies.

Liszt also wrote music criticism and was known as a conductor and teacher. He trained many of the performers of his time in his tradition.

Because of his ego and attitude, Liszt was always a controversial figure. However, he is recognized as one of the dominant personalities of 19th century Romantic music.

A rhapsody is a free-form piece that takes different tunes and strings them together. Liszt composed 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies. Hungarian Rhapsody #2 is the most famous and became a part of virtually every performance of the greatest pianists of the time. The piece has two distinct sections – the *Lassan* (Hungarian for slowly), the slow section of the *csárdás*, a Hungarian folk dance; and the *Friska* (from the Hungarian *friss* for fresh), the fast section of the *csárdás*.

The piece opens in a dark and dramatic mood with strong low chords. Dotted rhythms of alternating short and long notes borrowed straight from Hungarian folk dances become prominent. These slow opening pages gradually lead to brisk and energetic ones, just as folk dances may pick up the pace with time. These rapidly paced later pages sometimes have a light touch, but at other times they are all flash and fire. For the last page or so, the music rises and

falls like the rolling hills of Eastern Europe. Whether in the original solo piano version or the subsequent orchestration, it is music rich with Hungarian heritage.