Franz Liszt’s „Bell Compositions“: Attempting a Survey

Abstract: Musical instruments are particularly well suited to awaken associations at the sonic level. Their sound thus may represent an appropriate „sonic code“ for the most varied descriptions of moods. This becomes particularly clear with the sounds of bells and of the pipe organ. Both types of instruments are assigned to the sphere of the ecclesiastical and religious solely by their sonority. The sonic codes of bells and pipe organs have been used in compositions since the early 19th century. Although, the musical works where they appear must not automatically be linked to church music, since a specific sonic boundary between church music and secular works may become fluid or be completely dissolved.

Franz Liszt was a composer who increasingly created religious moments in his musical works by using such „sonic codes“. He introduced organ and bell sounds in his works in a variety of ways. In this paper three distinct categories for the sounds of bells will be proposed. This systematic approach does not only affect bells in the real sense, but includes also the production of bell sound by other musical instruments. For each of the three categories numerous examples from Liszt’s musical oeuvre are given.

The example of the analysis of the song „Ihr Glocken von Marling“ shows how Liszt uses the bell’s sonic codes to connect with both, the sphere of the religious as well as with that of the secular. In this context, the compositional process of this song and a specific historical imagination attached to it are also highlighted, like the local legend that Liszt personally heard the bells in the village of Marling in South Tyrol. According to my recent evaluation of the documents related to the song „Ihr Glocken von Marling“ by Franz Liszt, this is rather unlikely.

Keywords: Franz Liszt, church music, bells, sonic code, classification of compositions.
Church music in the narrower sense is music that is specially foreseen for the church and the liturgical requirements of a service. According to this definition, it is relatively easy to distinguish it from music with a different purpose, like for secular contexts such as the stage or for music at home. The definition of church music becomes more complex when a musical work of the ecclesiastical-religious sphere mixes with another musical work of the secular domaine in the same work. In the past centuries the Vatican has repeatedly responded to the penetration of the secular into church music through councils and papal decrees. On the other hand, composers use intentionally sounds with a religious connotation in secular works to suggest the sphere of the ecclesiastical, of religion, the sacred, the supernatural, the numinous. They rarely are sanctioned for this practice.

Franz Liszt also composed a large number of church music works, i.e. works intended for church and worship, in a wide variety of forms and casts. In his fragment „Über zukünftige Kirchenmusik“ [On Future Church Music] (1834) Liszt defines church music in the above mentioned sense, namely as the music for „worship ceremonies“. However, immediately afterwards Liszt expands the term „church music“, which in his opinion „today“ is no longer appropriate:

„Although this word [church music] is usually only understood as the music that is customary in the church during worship ceremonies, I use it here in its broadest meaning. [...] Today, while the altar trembles and shakes, today, when the pulpit and religious ceremonies are used as issues for mockers and doubters, the art has to leave the inner of the temple and spread out into the outside world to find the setting for its great rallies.“ (Liszt, 1834: 55f)

Just as Liszt describes the mixing of the religious with the secular in music, also his own secular musical works get increasingly mixed with religious contents. By the way, a similar process is also due to his private life. A well-proven method of transferring the sphere of the religious, the unearthly, the sublime from the „inner of the temple“ into the outside world, i.e. into a secular context, is to use musical topoi, whose semantics – in this case religiosity or the sacred – are understandable for everyone. Two instruments are particularly suitable for this: the pipe organ and bells. Both instruments


Original German version: „Obwohl man unter diesem Wort [Kirchenmusik] gewöhnlich nur die während der gottesdienstlichen Ceremonien in der Kircheübliche Musikk begreift, gebrauchicheshier in seiner umfassendsten Bedeutung. [...] Heutigenstags, wo der Altar erbebt und wankt, heutigenstags, wo Kanzel und religioße Ceremoniendem Spötter und Zweifler zu Stoffdienen, mußdie Kunst das Innere des Tempelsverlassen und sichaubreitend in der Außenwelt den Schauplatz für ihre großartigen Kundgebungen suchen.“
are associated with the church, representing the religious aura like no other instruments, since both are primarily used in the church within Christian worship. In this context, it is also noteworthy that even today these two instruments undergo a religious act of consecration before they can be heard for the first time; even renovated or restored pipe organs and bells are often consecrated one more time before they are put back into operation.

Therefore the use of the sound of bells and organs to generate a religious connotation in a work of secular purpose is an obvious procedure. It has to be mentioned in this particular context, that this is a phenomenon which appears only from the beginning of the 19th century music history on. From the point of view of Topic Theory, the generation of composers born in the first half of the 19th century were often committed to historisizing classical topics in music (Horton, 2014: 643). It is most likely that for Franz Liszt the sonic icon of the bell used in his „bell compositions“ is much more related to historical topics in music (in this case church music in general terms) than the attempt to comment any social fact of his time. Numerous composers until nowadays have used this sonic code to evoke religiosity. As a result, the boundary between ecclesiastical and secular music starts to become fluid, while Liszt’s original definition of church music is maintained: Church music is understood as „the music customary used in the church during worship ceremonies“. In other words, music that was not composed for the liturgy, but extends into the sphere of the religious, is not to be perceived as „church music“. This refers to a selection of compositions of Franz Liszt where organ sounds as well as bell sounds are used, without being intended as church music in the definition of Franz Liszt himself. Definitions of this compositional process, like „semantic content“, evocation, metaphor etc. are not fully able to describe the composers inner motivation. Franz Liszt has made several statements about the symbolic in music. In his account about „Santa Cecilia“ by Raffael, Franz Liszt stated: „Für mich, der ich in der heiligen Cäcilie ein Symbol gesehen, besteht dieses Symbol.“ („For me, who have seen a symbol in the Saint Cecilia, this symbol exists“). In other words: If the sounds of bells are conceived as having symbolic meanings, these symbols become reality for the composer. This might be the fundamental aesthetic basis of Liszt’s song „Ihr Glocken von Marling“. Any attempt to limit the use of bells or pipe organs to the sphere of religious contexts must fail in the case of Franz Liszt, for whom music as a medium transcends pure symbols by constructing new realities. Therefore, semiological-religious interpretations of Liszt’s works, such as those made by Mártan


Grabócz or Paul Merrick⁴, do not go far enough. This essay is intended to contribute to Liszt’s aesthetic positions that go beyond a purely semiological perspective.

*Three groups of „bell compositions“*

The following explanations concentrate on Liszt’s „bell compositions“, e.g. compositions in which main importance is given to the sounds of bells. A possible classification of these compositions can be made according to genres. In compositions associated with church music, like oratorios, masses, among others, bells and pipe organ sounds are used again and again to express religious contents and a devotional mood, what is never the case in Liszt’s purely secular compositions. However, this dichotomy between church and secular music is not relevant any longer for this selection of works where bells, their sounds and also their ecclesiastical meaning are in the forefront.

The broad midfield, in which the compositions alternate between ecclesiastical and secular styles, or even shift from secular to religious, can hardly be described in details. But it is precisely this intermediate area, in which secular compositions are mixed with religious appeal, occupying an extensive space in Franz Liszt’s oeuvre. To define Franz Liszt’s use of bell sounds by genre would be too vague. Instead, the classification presented below is based on the semantics of the bell sound. Three different work groups can be determined⁵:

1. **Compositions that have the word „bell“ [„Glocke“] or „bells“[„Glocken“] in their title and thus imply the idea of bell sound for listener and player, for example:**
   - the song „Ihr Glocken von Marling“ (S. 328)
   - the piano study „La Campanella“, No. 3 of the „Grandes études de Paganini“ (S. 141)
   - the piano piece „Ave Maria (Die Glocken von Rom)“ (S. 182)
   - the cantata „Die Glocken des Strassburger Münsters“ (S. 6)
   - the piano fantasy „Grande fantaisie de bravoure sur La clochette“ (S. 420)

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the piano piece „Les Cloches de Genève“ (the ninth piece from the piano cycle „Années de pèlerinage: Première année (Suisse)“, S. 160)
- the piano piece „La cloche sonne“ (S. 238)
- the sixth piece of the piano cycle „Weihnachtsbaum“ [Christmas Tree] (second version, S. 186) is titled „Carillon“ and the ninth piece is titled „Abendglocken“ [Evening Bells]

2. Pieces in which bell effects are used: This refers to repetitively used fourth or fifth intervals, often in long note values and in an exposed (usually lower) position. Such bell effects are not produced by bells, but by other instruments, like in the following works:
- in the piano quintet movement (with harp ad libitum) „Am Grabe Richard Wagners“ (S. 135)
- in the piano piece (related to „Am Grabe Richard Wagners, S. 135) „Feierlicher Marsch zum heiligen Gral aus Parsifal“ (S. 450)
- in the melodrama „Leonore“ (for piano and recitation, S. 346)
- in the concert paraphrase for piano „Miserere du Trovatore“ (S. 433), in which reference is made to „Quasi campana“ at the beginning in the left hand
- in the piano piece „Mosonyi’s Grab-Geleit“ (S. 194), in which the left hand moves in the lowest piano position and should sound „like bells“ [„wie Glocken“]
- in the Petrarca sonnet „Benedetto sia ’l giorno“ (the second piece in the first version, S. 270a), where in the middle part „dolcissimo religioso“ the left hand strikes the same bass note (the D) 21 times and is thus reminiscent of bells. Interestingly, Liszt starts with „Benedetto sia ’l giorno“ in the second version of the Petrarca sonnets (S. 270b) and omits in the middle section, which he calls no longer „dolcissimo religioso“, but „sempre dolcissimo“, the bells of the left hand. The corresponding „Sonetto 47 del Petrarca“ from the „Années de Pèlerinage: Deuxième Année (Italie)“ (S. 161) shows an intermediate form of both versions: The „dolcissimo“ – middle part brings the G in the left hand eight times as a bass note and thus reminds again of bells, but not as long as in S. 270a, in which the bass note can be heard almost four times as often in direct succession.
- in the piano piece „Trauermarsch“ (S. 206/2) Liszt writes between the right and left hand, so it applies to both hands playing initially in unison: „Like ringing bells“ [„wie Glocken-Geläute“]
- in the piano piece „Vive Henri IV“ (S. 239), an imaginary bell sound appears from bar 23 on: Liszt writes „Glockenspiel et cymbales antiques et triangle“ as instructions for the piano player
3. Works that are orchestrated with bells and therefore refer to a sacred context:
These are usually large orchestral works in which one or more bells can be found in
the instrumentation as a sound effect. The bell effects are often enhanced by other
instruments. Examples for this are:
- the oratorio „Christus“ (S. 3; the final part „Resurrexit“)
- the oratorio „Die Legende von der Heiligen Elisabeth“ [The Legend of Saint
  Elisabeth] (S. 2), in which a deep bell in E is used in the final part („Feierliche
  Bestattung der Elisabeth“ [Solemn Burial of Elisabeth])
- the „Andante religioso“ – part of „Szózat und Hymnus“ (S. 353), in which a bell or
tam-tam can be played „ad libitum“
- the first version of „Totentanz. Phantasie für Pianoforte und Orchester“ [Dance of
  Death. Phantasy for Pianoforte and Orchestra] published by Ferruccio Busoni (S.
  126/1) still names the bell („Campana“) as an alternative to the tam-tam; the second
  version (S. 126/2) is only orchestrated with tam-tam.

This alternative use of tam-tam in place of real bells demonstrates that Liszt uses two
sonic parameters to represent the ringing of bells: the sounding chords associated to the
harmonic spectrum of the sounding bell, or the bells function as signal instruments with
clear rhythmical features.

Liszt uses each of these three parameters as such: bells in the title, bell
effects produced by other instruments and bell instrumentation. He uses each of these
parameters alone, or combines one with another or with both others.
One work, for example, in which only one parameter is used, namely the use of bell
effects, is the piano quintet movement (with harp ad libitum) „Am Grabe Richard
Wagners“ (S. 135); neither verbal references to bells, nor the sound of real bells were
evoked here by Liszt (Ex.1).

The other extreme case, a composition in which all three mentioned parameters are used, is the cantata „Die Glocken des Strassburger Münsters“ [*The Bells of the Strasbourg Cathedral*] (S. 6). In this work the word „bells“ appears in the title, the instrumentation includes bells and bell effects are produced by others instruments (Ex. 2).

Example 2. „Die Glocken des Strassburger Münsters“ [*The Bells of the Strasbourg Cathedral*] (S. 6), part 2 „Die Glocken“[„The bells“], bar 1 ff.
The full use of all three parameters does not necessarily express an increased form of a religious mood. Liszt can also in a more subtly way establish the connection to the religious sphere by only using parameter two and three (the use of bells and imitating the sound of bells). This can be illustrated by Liszt’s song „Ihr Glocken von Marling“ for mezzo-soprano and piano.

The song „Ihr Glocken von Marling“(S. 328)

The poem „Ihr Glocken von Marling“ by the Austrian poet Emil Kuh was set by Liszt for mezzo-soprano and piano in the Villa d’Este near Rome on July 14, 1874. Liszt dedicated this song to Princess Marie von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst. The relationship with the dedicatee is multidimensional. On the one hand, Marie von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (Maiden name: zu Sayn-Wittgenstein) was the daughter of Countess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein and grew up in Weimar from 1849 on, where her mother fled with her after the separation from Carolyne’s husband, to live with Franz Liszt. In adulthood, Marie lived in Vienna, where she maintained friendship with the writer Friedrich Hebbel. Hebbel, on the other hand, was a friend of the poet Emil Kuh, the author of „Ihr Glocken von Marling“. Emil Kuh also became the first biographer of Hebbel and the first editor of Hebbel’s works. While working on his Hebbel biography, Kuh met at least once with Marie von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, as can be read in a letter to another friend of Franz Liszt, La Mara [Marie Lipsius], by Paul Bornstein, dated March 14, 1914: „I cannot regret enough, that he did not identify these memories as such, i.e. he did not publish absolutely literally, but revised it, so that today, with scientific rigor, it is no longer possible to say exactly where the princess ends and where Kuh begins.“

Emil Kuh (born 1828 in Vienna, died 1876 in Merano) was not only active as a writer; his friend Friedrich Hebbel encouraged him to turn to write literary criticism and feuilletons and to edit works of other writers – at the same time denying him a great poetic talent. In 1864 Kuh finally received a professorship at the Vienna Business Academy, through which he secured his living. In the 1870s, Kuh suffered from a lung disease, so that he settled in the climatically favorable Merano. One of the neighboring villages of Merano beyond the Adige is Marling, which can be comfortably reached by walking from Merano. The bells of the church in Marling were legendary long

6 Handwritten letter from Paul Bornstein (1868-1939) to La Mara [Marie Lipsius] (1837-1927) from March 14, 1914, in: City History Museum Leipzig, Autograph Collection, Signature A/728/2010. Original German version: „Nicht genug kann ich bedauern, dass er diese Erinnerungen nicht als solche kenntlich, d.h. absolut wörtlich publizierte, sondern sie überarbeitete, so dass man heutzutage mit wissenschaftlicher Strenge nicht mehr genau sagen kann, wo die Fürstin aufhört und wo Kuh anfängt. “
before Kuh’s stay in Merano: The large bell Anna Maria, for which a new casting has been documented for the late 16th century, was used – in a completely un-ecclesiastical manner – as a weather bell to alert thunderstorms. „Old, old times ago“ [„Vor alten, alten Zeiten“] Anna Maria should have been removed from Marling to the neighboring village Mais. It is said that Anna Maria even started to speak („I am called Anna Maria, I know all the weather, I drive away all thunderstorms, I stay on the Marling tower“ [„Anna Maria hoßi, alle Wetter woaßi, alle Wetter vertreib i, auf dem Marlinger Thurm bleib’i.“]). All these stories about the bells in Marling and, not least, its clear sound certainly motivated Emil Kuh to put a poetic memorial to the Marling bells. It can only be speculated as to how the bells in Marling may have sounded in Merano in the days of Kuh, in the 1870s. In the First World War the old bells were melted down. Only the famous large bell Anna Maria with a diameter of 171 cm, last cast by Bartolomeo Chiappani in Trento in 1847, was spared and therefore still forms in our days the deepest tone in the peal of Marling. Neither the Marling parish office does possess any recordings of the old bells or documents about the old peal, nor the archive of the bell foundry Chiappani – if it has been preserved – can be located. Therefore, the sound impression of the Marling bells with their interval relationships and the resulting overtone mixtures can not be reconstructed.

The tourist information offices in Meran and Marling never tire of citing Liszt’s musical setting of „Ihr Glocken von Marling“ as proof that Liszt was inspired to do this by a personal visit to Marling. A direct sound comparison is not possible because of the missing documents about the old peal; and even if Liszt was in Marling, he would not have had necessarily transferred the sound of the bells he heard into his song setting. Judging from Liszt’s letters, he felt inspired to this composition only by Kuh’s poem which he received from Marie von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst. „Ihr Glocken von Marling“ was written by Emil Kuh in 1873 in Merano; it can be assumed that he sent it directly to his friend the Princess von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, who sent it on to Liszt in the winter of 1873/74. At this time, Liszt was in the process of finalizing his composition „Die Glocken des Strassburger Münsters“ [The Bells of the Strasbourg Cathedral] (S. 6), i.e. to make the instrumentation. This information emerges from Liszt’s letter dated on July 16, 1874, written in the Villa d’Este (near Rome) to Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, in which he also writes that his „large bells“ („Die Glocken des Strassburger Münsters“) „gave birth to very small bells“:

„My Bells <haben gejungt> [gave birth] – and very small bells have come out of the big ones, Almost like improvised! The bambini in no way resemble their serious parents – neither Archangel Michael nor the Holy Apostles and Martyrs will patronize them - but they adapt fairly well to an innocent and dreamy Lied, whose

The simple, as Liszt claims *innocent* song is – different to the „gроссe Cloches“ („Die Glocken des Strassburger Münsters“ [*The bells of the Strasbourg Cathedral*]) – based on a very short short poem by Kuh:

*Ihr Glocken von Marling*

wie brauset ihr so hell;
ein wohlges Läuten,
as sänge der Quell.

*Ihr Glocken von Marling,*
ein heil’ger Gesang
umwaltet wie schützend
den weltlichen Klang.
*Nehmt mich in die Mitte*
der tönenden Flut,
*ihr Glocken von Marling* 
*behüten mich gut.*

[„You bells from Marling
how brightly you ring;
such a pleasant ringing
as songs of the spring.
You bells from Marling,
a sacred song
surrounds like protective
the secular sound.

8 Magne was the nickname of Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein for her daughter Marie; Liszt also used this nickname for Marie.

Take me in the middle
of the sounding tide,
you bells from Marling
protect me well.”]

Despite the brevity of the poem, the two spheres of the ecclesiastical and the secular are brought here into a direct connection: the „sacred song“ of the bells protectively surrounds the „secular sound“ of the speaker (Ex. 3).

Example 3. „Ihr Glocken von Marling“ (S. 328), beginning

Instead of the expected bell effects, i.e. quint-quart episodes in an exposed position of the piano, Liszt relies upon the imagination of the listener and player through the song title to suggest bell sounds. Chord repetitions, a regular pedaling in every bar, the instructions *una corda* and *ziemlich langsam, schwebend*, and the tonal vagueness are reminiscent of a diffuse ringing of bells from a distance, in which it is no longer possible to distinguish individual bells; a soundscape of bells is unfolded. It is likely that Emil Kuh has perceived in Merano the Marling peal as a unique soundscape. The key of this piece remains unclear until the end of the song; like swinging out a bell, the key of E major appears for the first time in bar 44. But with increasing distances it is interrupted again and again from other sounds, finally to establish itself as the basic key from bar 56 on. However, the keynote $E$ is left out until the end, whereby the „floating“ [„schwebend“] character of the song imagined by Liszt is correspondingly transferred into the music. Also from bar 56, the singing voice, a mezzo-soprano, represents the deepest voice (together with the lowest tone of the piano accompaniment); the speaker thus embodies the secular sphere („den weltlichen Klang“ [„the secular sound“]), the „down to earth“, while the imagined bell sound hovers over it as „heil’ger Gesang“ [„sacred song“]. Concentrated, with a few and simple musical means, Liszt connects in this song the religious feeling with the secular by imbedding them in the sound of bells. Liszt’s essay „Über zukünftige Kirchenmusik“ [On Future Church Music] mentioned in the beginning of this paper, already anticipated in 1834 what Liszt’s compositional
oeuvre and life should increasingly implement and make real: the creation of religiously
connote sounds that „spread out into the outside world to find the setting for its great
rallies."

Conclusion

The composition „Ihr Glocken von Marling“ demonstrates how the previously
suggested categories 1 (the word „bell“ or „bells“ in the title) and 2 (bell effects
produced by other instruments) from the systematics were combined in a congenial
way. Franz Liszt goes beyond these categories by mingling them into a completely new
compositional model. In this composition the „sonic icon“ of the bells not only shows
up in certain segments of the piano part, but also illustrates an intimate connection
with the text, creating a new level of musical and semantic expression: While the text
of the poem was induced by the real sound of the bells from Marling, the musical
implementation of it was inspired by this original textual reference depicting the sound
of the bells. Text, „sonic icon“, semantic description and the entire musical performance
setting of voice and piano, create a unique interplay of the secular and religious, together
with the natural and artistic spheres. A more profound fusion of content through poetry,
composition and sound is hard to imagine. At least for Franz Liszt, this seems to be the
most perfect way to connect the levels of the religious and the secular within an own
aesthetic concept. There is no need for a fourth category in my systematics that would
turn to the content level. Liszt himself has actually found a multilayered and perfectly
coherent compositional solution in the example analyzed above, „Ihr Glocken von
Marling“. In fact, with this piece, Franz Liszt puts into reality his own dictum quoted at
the beginning, by exhibiting his perception of church music „in its broadest meaning."

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**Zvučni kodovi zvona i orgulja korišćeni su u kompozicijama od početka 19. veka. Međutim, muzička dela u kojima su oni prisutni ne smeju biti automatski povezivana s crkvenom muzikom, jer specifična zvučna granica između crkvene muzike i svetovnih dela može postati fluidna ili se može potpuno stopiti. Franc List je bio kompozitor koji je sve više stvarao religiozne trenutke u svojim muzičkim delima koristeći takve „zvučne kodove“. Unosio je zvuk orgulja i zvona u svoja dela na različite načine. U ovom radu će biti predložene tri različite kategorije zvukova zvona.**

**APSTRAKT:** Muzički instrumenti su posebno pogodni za buđenje asocijacija na zvučnom nivou. Njihov zvuk, stoga, može predstavljati odgovarajući „zvučni kod“ za najrazličitije opise raspoloženja. To je posebno uočljivo kod zvuka zvona i orgulja. Obe vrste instrumenata pripadaju sferi crkvenog i verskog isključivo zbog svoje zvučnosti. Zvučni kodovi zvona i orgulja korišćeni su u kompozicijama od početka 19. veka. Međutim, muzička dela u kojima su oni prisutni ne smeju biti automatski povezivana s crkvenom muzikom, jer specifična zvučna granica između crkvene muzike i svetovnih dela može postati fluidna ili se može potpuno stopiti. Franc List je bio kompozitor koji je sve više stvarao religiozne trenutke u svojim muzičkim delima koristeći takve „zvučne kodove“. Unosio je zvuk orgulja i zvona u svoja dela na različite načine. U ovom radu će biti predložene tri različite kategorije zvukova zvona. Ovaj sistematski pristup ne odnosi se samo na zvona u pravom smislu, već uključuje i oponašanje zvuka zvona pomoću drugih muzičkih instrumenata. Za svaku od tri kategorije, navedeni su brojni primeri iz Listovog muzičkog opusa.

**Primjer analize pesme „Ihr Glocken von Marling“ [Zvona Marlinga] pokazuje kako List koristi zvučne kodove zvona da bi se povezao kako sa sferom religioznog, tako i s onom svetovnom. U tom kontekstu se takođe ističe kompozicioni postupak ove pesme i specifična istorijska mašta koja je s njom povezana, poput lokalne legende da je List čuo zvona u selu Marling u Južnom Tirolu. Prema mojoj nedavnoj proceni dokumenta koji se odnose na pesmu „Ihr Glocken von Marling“ Franca Lista, to je malo verovatno.**

**KLJUČNE REČI:** Franc List, crkvena muzika, zvona, zvučni kod, klasifikacija kompozicija.