



## 2023-2024 Musical Interludes | Pedagogues & Protégés

*Celebrating the musical legacies of three illustrious educators, their students, and their contemporaries*

Program Notes | Antonio Salieri

By Brian Lauritzen

It may be unfair to say, but it's also possibly true and/or helpful: everything you know about **Antonio Salieri** is wrong. Again, maybe not. But if you're a devotee of the film/play *Amadeus*, there is certainly a bias there which could cloud your judgment of who Antonio Salieri was and who he intersected with.

Despite what the film and play portray, Salieri was quite friendly with Mozart. He definitely did not poison Mozart. In fact, the two were reasonably close with one another during their time together in Vienna, even to the point of being friends. Antonio Salieri was also an incredibly important figure in the world of music history simply because of his incredible students. Among them: Beethoven, Schubert, Liszt, and W.A. Mozart's son, Franz Xaver.

As we ponder pedagogues and protégés this season here at the Pasadena Conservatory of Music, it is important to remember to celebrate Antonio Salieri. Here is a composer who lived in the innermost circles of musical life across generations. A composer who perhaps had more influence on music in the 18th and 19th centuries than anyone else. Salieri is no villain. He is a classical music hero worthy of celebration.

Beethoven studied with Antonio Salieri. His Violin Sonata No. 3 was written in 1798 and dedicated to Salieri. Franz Schubert considered Salieri to have been his most important composition teacher. Schubert's Trout Quintet – where he takes one of his own songs and writes a set of variations on it – was, no doubt, inspired by the innovative ways in which Salieri morphed his own music into something new.

One thing we know about Franz Liszt – who also studied with Antonio Salieri – is that he presided over some pretty crazy concerts. Including a bunch of firsts. Liszt changed the game in terms of performance practice. Obviously, he had a staggering piano technique. No one could play better than Franz Liszt. Everyone called him the Paganini of the Piano. Like Paganini, his performances were so virtuosic and unbelievable, some people thought he was possessed by the Devil. Liszt started touring at age 12. He toured Europe and Asia. And he did something no one had ever done before. He appeared on the concert stage alone. Until Liszt, musicians were all expected to share the concert stage with other performers. Liszt decided to go it alone. He called his concerts soliloquies.

Liszt said, "I don't know what other name to give these inventions of mine. ... Imagine that, I have ventured to give a series of concerts all by myself, affecting the Louis XIV style and ... saying cavalierly to the public 'Le concert c'est moi.' The concert is me."

Later, Liszt coined a new term. In 1840, he gave a "soliloquy" concert in London and decided to call it a "solo recital." Obviously, a "recital" is a term we're all familiar with today, but it was brand new in Franz Liszt's day. "What does he mean?," people would say. "How can one recite upon the piano," they asked. But here we are today and we still call solo piano performances recitals.

Another innovation that Liszt brought to piano performance was the actual staging of a concert (or recital). Liszt set a precedent by situating the piano differently. He was the first to place it at a right angle to the stage. The open lid projected the sound better into the hall and allowed audiences to see him in profile. Another innovation: Liszt was also the first to enter from the wings onto the stage. He was the first to perform from memory. The first to perform all of the keyboard music that existed up to that point: from Bach to Chopin to his own new music. Liszt played to massive crowds: 3,000 or more, in some cases. People would grab at his clothes and hair. They would try to get their hands on spent cigar butts or broken piano strings – the casualties of Liszt’s charismatic performances. It was the German poet and writer Heinrich Heine who coined the phrase, Lisztomania.

For today’s purposes, it’s Lisztomania-, Schubert-, Beethoven-, Mozart-, and indeed Salieri-mania. Enjoy!