

Conversion, Inversion, Reversion, Retroversion

Author(s): Alexander J. Ellis

Source: *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 27, No. 524 (Oct. 1, 1886), p. 614

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3365241>

Accessed: 10-01-2016 03:01 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Musical Times Publications Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Belgian papers announce the death of Etienne Ledent, a professor of the pianoforte at the Liège Conservatoire, and the composer of some charming pieces for his instrument.

The death is also announced, at Berlin, of Professor Hugo Schwartzter, the director of a musical conservatorium in that capital.

CORRESPONDENCE.

FRANZ LISZT.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

SIR,—Will you kindly grant me a little space for a few remarks respecting my article on Liszt in last month's MUSICAL TIMES? When writing the article in question I was withheld by the fear of seeming impertinent from concluding the portion dealing with the difficult and necessarily briefly-discussed subject of Liszt as a composer with a request to the reader—namely, that he should not allow his partiality for, or antipathy to, the master to wrest my words into a meaning not intended by me. What I dreaded has come to pass; for not only do I find that extremists are displeased because they miss in my criticism the absolute laudation or abuse which alone can satisfy them, but that to the qualifications of my praise and blame an interpretation is given which I did not at all contemplate. However, I have no intention to restate my opinion, knowing well that even the most exhaustive disquisition, couched in the most precise language, is no security against misunderstandings of this kind. The open question of Liszt's position as a composer can, indeed, only be settled practically—*i.e.*, by demonstration—æsthetic arguments and authoritative assertions are of no avail, nor, as a rule, of much value. Let once the prejudice be removed that Liszt was unvisited by inspiration, and destitute of the sense of beauty and form, and the battle will be won, and this king will soon come to his own. Now, to remove this prejudice nothing is needed but an acquaintance with Liszt's simpler compositions—with songs like "Das Veilchen," "Es muss ein Wunderbares sein," "Mignon's Lied," "Der du vom Himmel bist," "Die Lorelei," &c., with pianoforte pieces like the "Consolations," and many a number from the "Années de Pèlerinage," and with symphonic poems like "Les Préludes," "Orpheus," "Mazeppa," and "Die Ideale." And if the prejudice is once removed, I have no doubt that many other more exacting vocal and instrumental, choral and orchestral works, will be found palatable. As to the above-mentioned songs and pianoforte pieces, even the most classical of the classicists, unless he be at the same time an out and out pedant, cannot but admit their beauty. And though he may at first be taken aback by the divergence of forms in the symphonic poems, he must before long recognise, besides other excellences, their easy intelligibility. Several of Liszt's Rhapsodies have become great favourites with the public. If they are sometimes treated by critics *de haut en bas*, I think the view taken is a mistaken one. They ought not to be compared with Beethoven's symphonies and similar works. They are something very different, something *sui generis*, and something well worth having. Even were they nothing more than mere *jeux d'esprit*—and they are more—they would have a *raison d'être*. But enough of this.

A friend of mine has accused me of having made a scornful allusion to Berlioz, of having glorified Liszt at his expense. I am unable to see how this is borne out by my words. Certainly nothing was further from my mind than the intention of saying anything in disparagement of the great French master. I wished only to point out that, in my opinion, the totality of Liszt's works which are likely to live would turn out to be more valuable (considered quantitatively as well as qualitatively) than that of Berlioz's. I shall not quarrel with anyone whose calculation differs from mine. That I selected the long-neglected and only lately-appreciated French master for comparison can hardly surprise, seeing that his and his contemporary's fortunes as composers offer some points of resemblance. And the great number of diverse works composed by Liszt—Berlioz's are few and less diverse in kind—seems to me to justify my supposition.

In conclusion, I should like to correct a misprint which found its way into the tenth line of the second paragraph of my Liszt article, where, of course, "Eisenach" should be "Eisenstadt."

I am, Sir, yours truly,
FR. NIECKS.

DR. HANSLICK ON MUSIC IN ENGLAND.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

DEAR SIR,—Whilst agreeing with your correspondent's remarks concerning the onesidedness and recklessness of Dr. Hanslick in his criticism, I would like to ask him if he is not going a little too far when he says: "Dr. Hanslick knows perfectly well that the fashion in which the orchestral chief directs his forces matters no more, provided the results be satisfactory, than the colour of his whiskers or his tie. He may sit down or stand up, &c." I certainly think that a great deal depends upon the "fashion" of the conductor, if he desires a "satisfactory result." I certainly believe that a conductor, who is standing and is able to take his eyes from the score to watch his men, is more likely to achieve success, than one sitting down or rivetting his eyes on the music. Indeed, I think it quite necessary that a conductor should prompt and animate every instrument or set of instruments by his special notice, were it only to prevent mishaps. He should be in some way omnipresent; and this he can without going to the extreme of "wild gesticulation."

I have frequently had the pleasure of listening to the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig, one of the best in the world. As a matter of course, only good conductors have access to the *bâton* there, yet the difference of power and skill of these leaders was quite noticeable, and never did I hear more music brought out in the old house than when Brahms conducted. He seemed to be truly omnipresent, electrifying every player and plucking the very notes from each instrument. It is needless perhaps to say that if I have made the above remarks, it is without any reflection on Sir Arthur Sullivan or his *confrère*. Far be it from me.—I remain, dear Sir,

Yours respectfully,
CH. BEHR.

Southsea, September 11, 1886.

[Our correspondent's argument goes to show that "a great deal depends upon the 'fashion' of the conductor if he desires a 'satisfactory result.'" We never said anything to the contrary, but simply declared that, provided the result be satisfactory, the fashion matters nothing. Cannot our correspondent see the distinction?—ED. M. T.]

CONVERSION, INVERSION, REVERSION,
RETROVERSION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

SIR,—I thank the reviewer for pointing out, on page 548, the passage in which he conceives that I "propose to call inversion conversion." I find that I make no such "proposal," but used *conversion* in a translation where he would prefer *inversion*, and where I should now prefer *retroversion*. Helmholtz says (page 498 of his fourth edition) that the mode of the minor sixth (in tempered notes C D♭ E♭ F G A♭ B♭ C') is the direct *Umkehrung* (turning about—(1) upside down, *inversion*; (2) right side left, *reversion*; (3) ascending and descending, *retroversion*) of the major mode. His meaning was that the ascending intervals of the first are the same as the descending intervals of the second, which is true for tempered, but not for just intonation, unless the grave second is used in descending. As this did not seem to be *inversion*, I used the logical term *conversion*. Thus, "all mortals are men" (false) is the conversion of the direct proposition, "all men are mortals" (true). I beg to disclaim any intention of calling musical inversion conversion. I still fail to see how my harmonic cell (a major and minor chord having the same prime and fifth) contains a true reversion, but do not wish to occupy space on that matter.

Yours truly,
ALEXANDER J. ELLIS.
25, Argyll Road, Kensington, September 9, 1886.