

## Beethoven and the musical history of the Château of Hradec nad Moravicí

Markéta Wiesnerová

The Château of Hradec nad Moravicí (until 1968 called Hradec near Opava, *Gratz* in German), together with the charming little town of the same name, graces the picturesque terrain in the foothills of the Lower Jeseník mountain range in Northern Moravia. The long and steep rocky outcrop high above the River Moravice was first settled in 3000–2700 BC. The Slavs arrived and settled in 8<sup>th</sup> century, with the Přemyslids building their princely castle in 11<sup>th</sup> century on the central part of the rock. Two centuries later the castle burnt down and was replaced by a huge Gothic complex, including domestic and agricultural buildings. From 1461 onwards the castle was the property of the Czech kings, including Jiří of Poděbrady (1420-71) and Vladislav II (Jagellon) who succeeded him. The castle was often pledged to various creditors and slowly deteriorated. The subsequent Renaissance and Baroque-style rebuilding of the castle that took over seventy years, in two major stages, is connected with the name of the new, hereditary owners, the free Lords Pruskovský of Pruskov, who acquired the property in 1585. By the end of this period a new, four wing residence was built with grandiose halls, turrets, a clock tower on the main façade of the building, a courtyard, a farm and a large woodland park.

In 1733 the château changed hands again and in 1788 it was sold to Carl Johann Amadeus Lichnowsky of Vostice and Werdenberg, a hereditary Prussian aristocrat. His son Karl Alois then radically changed the chateau's appearance by rebuilding it in the spirit of the Empire style. Under the leadership of Jan Mihatsch of Krnov and Karl Klumpner of Fulnek the work took more than fifty years, resulting in the château as we know it today. Some later changes took place during the ownership of Karl's grandson Karl Maria, 5<sup>th</sup> Prince Lichnowsky, mainly the construction of the two-story 'Red Château', 1872-79, designed by the Wrocław architect Alexis Langer, who in 1895 completed the castle wall on the east side of the complex. The twentieth century saw no further changes to the buildings. In 1945 Willem, the 7<sup>th</sup> Prince Lichnowsky, a German citizen, was dispossessed of all his properties as a result of the Beneš Decrees.



**Château of Hradec nad Moravicí** *The 19<sup>th</sup>-century white tower stands next to the older part of the château*

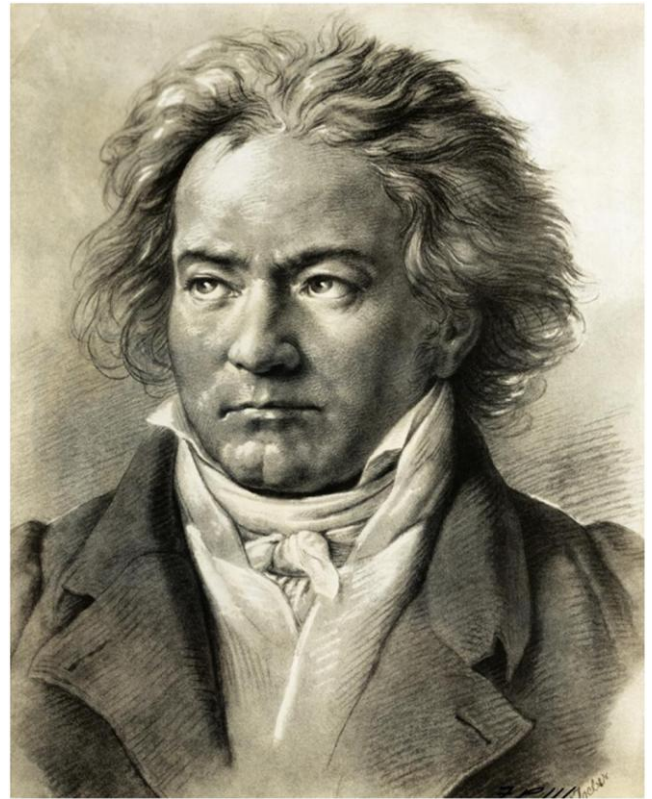
The musical history of Hradec Château is well documented in the 18<sup>th</sup> century sources. As well as performances by individual musicians, there are also records of a château band between 1760- 1775 during the ownership of Baron Wolfgang Karl Neffzern-Thomagnini who made up the band out of his servants, a common practice at the time. The band produced an opera by Johann Adolph Hasse, *Thisbe i Piramo* in 1771, the rare libretto of which was printed in Opava by Magdalena Schindler and has survived, and is now kept at the Silesian Museum. Production of the opera was led by the Kapellmeister Matheus Santer but it is not known where the performance took place. However, all indications point to one of the great halls of the château.

An interesting musical chapter of the château's history can be seen through the visits of Ludwig van Beethoven at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The owner of the château, Karl Alois, 2<sup>nd</sup> Prince Lichnowsky, a prominent representative of the Austrian intellectual aristocracy and a magnanimous supporter of the arts, was himself a music lover and together with his wife Kristina, nee Thun-Hohenstein, led a very rich social life and counted among the pupils of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Karl Alois greatly admired the talent of the young Beethoven and from 1800 onwards provided

him with living quarters in his Viennese palace and a generous stipend of 600 gulden per year. He also gifted Beethoven rare musical instruments (Guarneri, Amati) and helped him with important business deals and social introductions. As a mark of gratitude, Beethoven dedicated to Count Lichnowsky three of his piano trios in E-flat major, G major, C minor, op.1; piano sonatas in C minor, op. 13 (*Pathétique*) and in A-flat major, op.26, as well as the Symphony No.2 in D major, op.36. The relationship of the Countess with Beethoven was almost maternal and she looked after him like an adoptive son. The composer dedicated to her the piano transcription of the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, op. 43, and the *Variations in G major for Piano and Cello*, op 45.

According to surviving correspondence Beethoven also enjoyed the friendship of Karl's brother, Moritz Lichnowsky, to whom he became even closer after the Count's socially unsuitable marriage to actress Josefina Stummer. He dedicated to him the piano sonata in E minor, op. 90, piano variations on the theme from *Prometheus* and *Eroica*, op. 35. The series of compositions dedicated by Beethoven to the Lichnowsky family is considerable and no doubt shows his gratitude and positive disposition towards the noble lords.

Beethoven first visited Hradec in the summer of 1806. He had gratefully accepted an invitation from his patron, Karl Alois, to spend some time at his country summer seat. It provided the composer with a chance to escape a Vienna that was occupied by Napoleonic soldiers, and to recover from the bitter disappointment after the unsuccessful première of his opera *Leonora* (later rewritten and renamed as *Fidelio*). His visit to Hradec lasted from the middle of July to the very end of September 1806. The 35-year-old composer and pianist occupied a room on the second floor of the north-facing front of the château where all the guests were put up. The piano he used when composing is now one of the stars of the château's collections. It is evident from his correspondence and biographies that nature played a vital part in his creative process. His long walks in the château's extensive park and woodlands would have been very calming and inspirational. However, Beethoven was a fiery, impulsive man always ready to offer his opinion and despite the fact that Karl Alois was one of his most generous benefactors, his first visit to Hradec is marked by the well-known falling-out with no less than Karl Alois himself. It is said that Karl Alois had asked Beethoven to play the piano for



*A portrait of Beethoven from 1818*

the invited French officers, a request the composer refused so vehemently that even a chair came in handy to attack the host. And before he fled the château, in the middle of the night and a violent storm to stay with a friend in Opava, full of anger and in haste, he managed to write the legendary note to the Prince: "*Prince! What you are is through chance and birth. What I am is on account of myself. There may be thousands of princes, but only one Beethoven.*" An important source for this story are the memoirs of the Opava-based doctor, director of the local hospital, Anton Wieser, Beethoven's old schoolmate and friend who put him up that stormy night in his house at the corner of today's Beethoven and Ostrožná Streets. From there the composer travelled back to Vienna.

It is said that while fleeing from Hradec, Beethoven had in his coat pocket the original score of the famous sonata in F minor, *Appassionata*, op. 57. He had worked on the *Appassionata*, his most frequently played piano sonata, full of passion and Shakespearean drama, since 1804 and it is quite possible that he had brought the manuscript with him to Hradec to make the final corrections before publication. The manuscript is clearly damaged, with some experts claiming it was caused by raindrops but there is no evidence to confirm this. Beethoven mentions a certain 'unfortunate incident





Karl Alois, 2<sup>nd</sup> Prince Lichnowsky, Beethoven's patron  
*Below, the room in the château where Beethoven stayed*







The library of the Château of Hradec nad Moravicí

*The portrait is of Count Robert Lichnovsky (1822–1879), a canon of the Chapter of Olomouc*

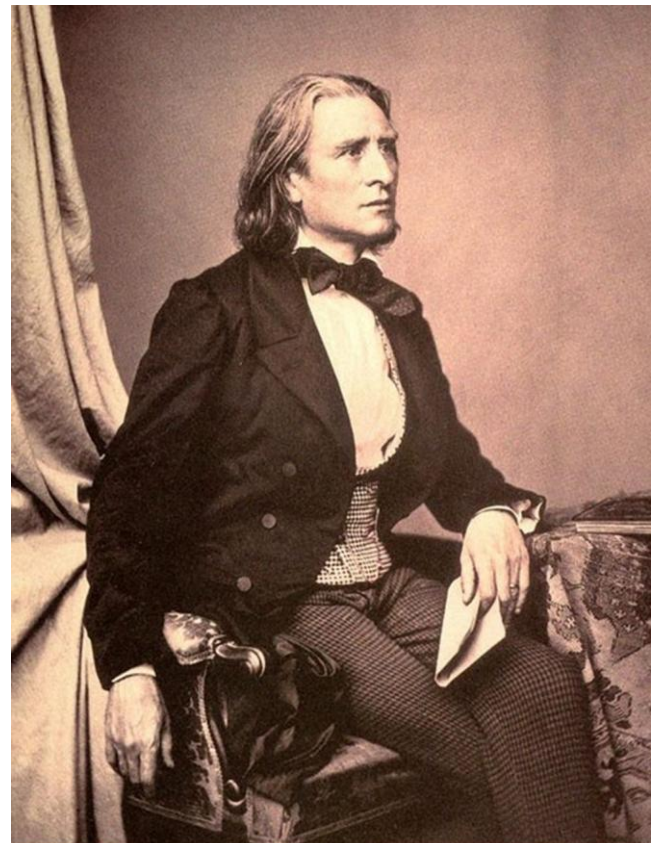
at Hradec' in his correspondence with Count Moritz Lichnowsky in 1814.

In his letter of 21st September 1814 to Moritz from Baden the composer says: *"I kiss the hands of the Countess in gratitude for her kind regards and her patronage. I have never forgotten how much I owe you even though the unfortunate incident had prevented me from expressing it the way I would have wished to. Live happily, my esteemed friend, and always regard me worthy of your friendship."*

The fact that their friendship continued is confirmed by Beethoven's second visit to Hradec in September 1811. This time Beethoven did not stay long before continuing on his way to Leipzig. He arrived in Opava on 26 September from the spa town of Teplice to attend the performance of his *Mass in C major*, op.86. This demanding work was apparently being rehearsed for three afternoons in the Minorite Monastery at Opava, with the first performance scheduled for Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> or Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September 1811 at the Church of the Holy Ghost under the leadership of the choir master Josef Schmitz.

According to the memoirs of Aloys Fuchs who was the soprano soloist of the performance, then twelve years of age, Beethoven not only attended the rehearsals but after the Mass also improvised on the organ, *'much to everybody's amazement.'* Aloys Fuchs describes it in a letter to Otto Jahn, a collector of musical instruments thus: *"In 1811 Beethoven was visiting Prince Lichnowsky at the chateau in Hradec. His mass was being performed in Opava and great care was taken to make all the preparations. Beethoven himself had to show the drummer-watchman how to play the tympani solo. After the performance of the Mass Beethoven spent half an hour playing his fantasies on the organ, much to everybody's amazement."*

Beethoven was not the only prominent musical guest at Hradec. The Italian violin virtuoso Paganini also visited as well as the pianist and composer Franz Liszt and his daughter Cosima, the wife of composer Richard Wagner. The next owner of the chateau, Prince Felix Lichnowsky, an adventurer and a conservative politician, met Liszt in 1841 and accompanied him on his concert tour around Europe. When Felix's brother Robert was serving the first mass after his ordination in the church in Hradec, Liszt himself was invited to the celebration. He arrived around 20th May 1846 and wrote in the visitors' book: *'F. Liszt (not a complete foreigner)'*. He played the organ in the church in Hradec and improvised on the theme of Beethoven's sonata *Pathétique*. It is necessary to remember that 1846



*Liszt as a young man*

stands out as a year when Liszt was at the top of his profession as a concert pianist and, while in Silesia, he also gave concerts in Ratiboř (now Racibórz in Poland) on 29th May, and in Těšín (now Cieszyn in Poland) on 2nd June, as well as two performances in Opava on 27th May and 1st June. The second of the concerts in Opava was a charitable event at the Opava Theatre, in aid of a children's home. For this occasion Felix Lichnowsky had a piano in a mahogany case brought in all the way from Cologne.

Liszt's second visit to Hradec is coloured by an arresting love story. While travelling in Russia in February 1848 Liszt met the Countess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein. The following year, under rather dramatic circumstances, she fled from her husband, having taken her daughter with her, and met Liszt at one of the Lichnowsky properties at Kreuzenort (now Krzyżanowice in Poland). From there, in the middle of April 1848, they travelled together to Hradec. At that time, most likely under the influence of the Countess, Liszt decided to end his career as a concert pianist and he settled in Weimar. There he accepted the post of the Court Kapellmeister and concentrated mostly on conducting and composing. He never returned to Hradec since a few months later in the revolutionary year of 1848 Felix, a member of the German National Assembly, was shot and battered to death by a fanatical crowd in



Frankfurt am Main. Felix's heart was placed in a silver casket and is kept at the Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul in his beloved Hradec.

The musical legacy of Hradec is alive and continues today. Since 1960 the château has been hosting an annual international interpreters' competition and the Beethoven Hradec Festival. It alternates composition, piano, violin, cello and chamber music and attracts international competitors.

**Markéta Wiesnerová** is *Music Curator at the Silesian Museum, Opava*  
*Translated by Jana Sommerlad*



*Bust of Beethoven in a courtyard of the château of Hradec nad Moravicí*

---

Opening times of the state-owned château:  
April and October: only Saturdays and Sundays  
from 10.00 to 16.00. Closed on Easter Monday and  
28th October.

May to September: Saturdays and Sundays and Public  
Holidays from 10.00 to 18.00; weekdays, except  
Monday, from 9.00 to 17.00

*Midday break from 12.00 to 12.30*

Visits at any time of year by arrangement: 553783444  
[www.zamek-hradec.cz](http://www.zamek-hradec.cz) (Czech only)

*Footnote: a later Prince Lichnowsky, Karl Max (1860–1928), was the Ambassador of the German Empire to the Court of St James's in 1914. An urbane man of anglophile tendencies, he raised objections to Germany's efforts to provoke an Austro-Serbian war. He implored the German government to accept an offer of British mediation in the Austro-Serbian dispute. On July 27, he followed with a telegram arguing that Germany could not win a continental war. This was not shown to Kaiser Wilhelm II. A final telegram on July 29 to the German Foreign Office stated simply 'if war breaks out it will be the greatest catastrophe the world has ever seen.' His warnings went unheeded, and by the time the final telegram reached Berlin, Austrian troops were already bombarding Belgrade. His tomb in Chuchelna, close to Hradec, is in need of funds for conservation.*