



Call for Papers

International Conference

Liszt and Princess Carolyn zu Sayn-Wittgenstein: Religion, Music, Arts and Politics in Rome in the Second Half of the 19th Century

Institut français Centre Saint-Louis
Rome, 22–23 October 2026

Whilst Franz Liszt (1811–1886) and Princess Carolyn zu Sayn-Wittgenstein (1819–1887), née Iwanowska, were central figures in intellectual and social life in Rome for over 25 years, no coordinated research or collective reflection has yet been undertaken on the subject, nor on their relationship. Uncovering and studying new sources, updating the knowledge underpinning them, understanding the context in an interdisciplinary manner, analysing the agency of Liszt and the princess in Rome during a pivotal period of its political and religious history, and, conversely, the way in which the city influenced their work, is the aim of this conference, which also seeks to highlight the central role that Princess Wittgenstein played in the intellectual life of Europe during the second half of the century.

Liszt discovered Rome in 1839 with Countess Marie d'Agoult, whilst he was still steeped in the Parisian Romanticism of his youth. Open to the ideas of Saint-Simonism and Romantic religious sentiment, he was inspired by the social and Catholic thought of Lacordaire, Montalembert, Lamartine and Lamennais, setting some of their texts to music. Influenced by *Paroles d'un croyant* and the social doctrine of the Church, he developed an artistic, social and spiritual philosophy reflected not only in his music but also in several articles on art, the situation and the role of artists in society. But it was above all after 1861 and his return to the fold of the Church that Rome came to play a significant role in his life, his work and his spiritual journey. He settled there to be with and marry Carolyn zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, a Polish Catholic princess from Ukraine (Podolia), the wife of a Protestant Russian prince, from whom she was separated and later widowed, though never divorced. The wedding, which was to take place at San Carlo al Corso, was ultimately forbidden at the very last moment. Liszt nevertheless remained in Rome and decided to devote himself to the 'regeneration' of Catholic music, composing, for example, two oratorios (*Die Legende von der Heiligen Elisabeth*, based on a German libretto by Otto Roquette, inspired by Montalembert, and *Christus*). In 1865, he received the minor orders at the Vatican. Close to many prelates and protected by Cardinal Gustav zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Grand Chaplain to Pius IX, 'Abbé Liszt' redoubled his efforts to draw up, in preparation for the Council, a plan for the reform of church music. Pius IX, whom he met on several occasions, encouraged him in his vocation as a Catholic artist and accepted the dedication of his *papal hymn* 'Tu es Petrus'. Later, he also composed a 'Pro Papa' for Leo XIII, whom he likewise met.

At a time of political and social upheaval in Rome, Liszt and Princess Wittgenstein frequented cosmopolitan circles and salons, including German, Austro-Hungarian, English, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian and French communities (notably at the Villa Medici). They displayed their ultramontanism, their Francophilia and their unwavering support for Napoléon III and the Second Empire. Their life in Rome spanned and adapted to the political upheavals of 1870 and to what they described, in their correspondence, as 'the dual ceremonial between the Quirinal and the Vatican'. They maintained close ties with prelates and artists (the Nazarenes, Hébert, Filippo Bigioli, whose paintings of the *Divine Comedy* served as the backdrop for a performance of Liszt's *Dante Symphony*, etc.).

One cannot understand Liszt without considering his devotion to Princess Wittgenstein, to whom he dedicated his symphonic poems with these words: ‘To She who has fulfilled her faith through love, expanded her hope through suffering, and built her happiness through sacrifice! To She who remains the companion of my life, the firmament of my thought, the living prayer and the Heaven of my soul’. Their relationship is inextricably linked to Rome, as evidenced by a 25-year correspondence (still partly unpublished), a veritable window onto the Eternal City, its salons, and its political, diplomatic and religious debates. The princess published, under her own name and sometimes anonymously, a large number of articles and books on art, religion and the history of the Church: a study on the Sistine Chapel (1867), *Simplicité des colombes, prudence des serpents — Quelques réflexions suggérées par les femmes et les temps actuels*, *Bouddhisme et christianisme* (1868), *L’Église attaquée par la médisance* (1869), *Entretiens pratiques s à l’usage des femmes du monde. Religion et monde* (1875). Like Liszt, she was at the centre of a cosmopolitan Roman network, hosted a highly sought-after salon, collected ancient and contemporary drawings, and corresponded with a multitude of artistic, religious, intellectual and political figures from around the world: Hippolyte Flandrin, Ernest Hébert (who painted her portrait and whom she often visited at the Villa Medici), Eduard Bendemann, Armand Baschet, the Bonaparte and Caetani families, Émile Ollivier, Ernest Renan, Félix Dupanloup, Louis-Ernest-Romain Isoard, Hyacinthe Loyson, known as ‘Father Hyacinthe’, Charles Gay, Ludovico Altieri, Fanny Lewald, Malwida Meysenburg, Charles de Montalembert, the Marquise de Blocqueville, etc.

Gregorovius notes that she ‘overflows with wit’, and Louis Teste observes that ‘there are few minds as vigorous, as inquisitive, as that of Princess Carolyne of Sayn-Wittgenstein [...]. She has traced all religions back to their origins. If necessary, she would debate with Confucius, Buddha or Muhammad. [...] Do not raise an objection to her! She refutes it with a hundred philosophical, theological or historical arguments, interwoven with Greek, Latin, Russian, German and Italian quotations that leave you breathless [...] . The Vatican sends her bouquets. [...] There is no member of the Sacred College nor domestic prelate of His Holiness who has not passed through her salons’. Yet her *Causes intérieures de la faiblesse extérieure de l’Église en 1870*, published on the occasion of the Council, was partially placed on the Index in 1877. One of the two consultants of the Congregation of the Index, Michael Haringer, wrote that he was overcome with “nausea” at her comments, for she “wishes to reform the whole Church and sets herself up as judge of the Supreme Pontiff, of an ecumenical council, of the whole Church”. In his view, she represented the faction of women who had stirred up “great storms” during the Council. Émile Ollivier, Liszt’s son-in-law, had warned her: “This is Mennaisian Catholicism. You will be placed on the Index.” As for Liszt, who came to Rome every year until his death to see her, he tried to console her, whilst reaffirming, for his part, his submission to the Church: “Unfortunately, the Index has disapproved of your immense work—I would have had both my hands cut off to prevent this from happening! Perhaps a way will be found later for the Index to reconsider in your honour.” Yet the princess continued to publish new volumes until her death, eight months after Liszt, and lies in the Campo Santo Teutonico, in the shadow of St Peter’s dome.

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The scientific committee will pay particular attention to proposals for papers that offer fresh perspectives on the subject and contribute to the advancement of knowledge, either by addressing previously unexplored issues or by drawing on rare and unpublished sources. Papers, in the form of presentations (20 mins), may explore issues related to, but not limited to:

1. Liszt and musical life in Rome in the 19th century (salons, concert halls, etc.)
2. The correspondence networks of Liszt and Princess Wittgenstein during their time in Rome
3. Liszt and Princess Wittgenstein’s connections with Roman salons and national or cosmopolitan artistic communities (Villa Medici, etc.)
4. Liszt, Princess Wittgenstein and the social doctrine of the Church
5. The Vatican Council
6. Roman political history and diplomacy around 1870
7. Pius IX and Leo XIII’s approach to the arts and music
8. Catholic women and the Church in the second half of the 19th century

9. Princess Wittgenstein's correspondence, writings and collection

The languages of the conference are Italian, French and English.

Proposals for papers (20 minutes) must include:

- an abstract of no more than 4,000 characters (including spaces), which must include a list of sources used;
- a bio-bibliography of no more than 100 characters, including spaces;
- contact details (email and telephone number);
- institutional affiliation, if applicable;
- a list of technical requirements.

Proposals for papers should be sent to the following address: nicolas.dufetel@cnrs.fr before **1 June 2026**

The organiser will cover two nights' accommodation in Rome and meals.

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Scientific coordinator

Nicolas Dufetel, CNRS (Iremus)

Scientific Committee

- Biancamaria Antolini, Conservatorio di musica « F. Morlacchi » di Perugia
- Michela Berti, Conservatorio di Musica « F. Morlacchi » di Perugia, Pieux Établissements de la France à Rome et à Lorette
- Albane Cognet, École française de Rome
- Colette di Matteo, Pieux Établissements de la France à Rome et à Lorette
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- Augustin Laffay, Comité pontifical des sciences historiques
- Mariateresa Storino, Conservatorio di Musica « G. Rossini » di Pesaro
- Claudio Toscani, Fondazione Istituto Liszt, Bologna, Università degli Studi di Milano Statale.

Organising Committee

Lorraine Creusot, Pierre-Marie Passot (Institut français Centre Saint-Louis)

Organising institution

Institut français Centre Saint-Louis, Rome

Partner institutions

- Pieux Établissements de la France à Rome et à Lorette
- Fondazione Istituto Liszt, Bologne
- Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini
- Institut de recherche en musicologie, Paris (Iremus)