

DLA doctoral thesis – a summary

József Bazsinka Jr.

The development of brass chamber music
in Hungary before 1990

Supervisor: Balázs Horváth

The Liszt Academy of Music
28th doctoral course
classified as art, cultural, and historical sciences

Budapest

2017

I. Antecedents of the research

My chosen field is not well-researched thus the available literature is relatively sparse. Among the reasons for this is that the period I focus on is quite close to the present day. Furthermore, brass chamber music belongs to the lesser well-known genres in classical music – literature has almost exclusively been produced by those who are part of that small community, myself included. Earlier studies were concerned with brass chamber music in Hungary to very little extent. Consequently, the literature used in my thesis consisted chiefly of some chapters of István Bogár's book *A rézfúvós hangszerek (Brass instruments)* published in 1975, the 1984 October issue of the quarterly *Brass Bulletin*, which gives an overview of brass music in Hungary as well as dissertations by László Szabó and István Péter Farkas, completed in 2010 and 2014 respectively. All these authors were part of the Hungarian brass music scene, either as composers, performers or witnesses of milestone events, thus their writings are of immense value and importance. István Bogár's book, written in the early 1970s, testifies to how much the genre has changed since the mid-20th century. This is evidenced by the fact that he singles out the sextet as the most prominent type of brass music ensemble in 1975, while today it is well-known that only a few years later the quintet took its place. As for the two dissertations, László Szabó gives a thorough overview of Hungarian brass chamber music in his, while

the one written by István Péter Farkas includes an immensely helpful database. This is a compilation of several things: brass music teachers in the most important Hungarian music schools, students of the Liszt Academy of Music and members of the brass music sections of Hungarian orchestras, complete with dates and names. All the above-mentioned writings are, necessarily, limited in scope. János Csomós' thesis *A Budapest Rézfúvós Quintet (The Budapest Brass Quintet)* (2014) is the first piece which chose a Hungarian brass ensemble as the focus of an in-depth look; his work was an important source for my thesis.

II. Sources

In the dedication to my dissertation the following can be read: „For my dissertation I contacted the most prominent figures in Hungarian brass chamber music, among others people who knew the most important teachers and artists. The fact that they shared their memories, knowledge and in many cases documents with me allowed my thesis to be much more precise in describing events, tendencies and people within the brass music community of the examined period.” Chief among those who helped me were Gábor Adamik, Levente Bakó, József Bazsinka Sr., Gusztáv Hóna, László Szabó and Vilmos Szabó, all (former) members of outstanding Hungarian brass ensembles. Their memories, shared with me during our meetings were essential

for drawing an accurate picture of those ensembles. For researching the oeuvre of László Szabó Sr. I received invaluable help from former students of the Hungarian People's Army Musician Warrant Officer Training Vocational Secondary School (MNZTSZ), both in the form of oral history and photographs. This was an immeasurable contribution because material about this outstanding teacher - whose influence on Hungarian brass chamber music is hard to overestimate - was scarce: one portrait in the March 1984 issue of *Muzsika* (Music) and an interview with him in the May 1980 issue of *Parlando*.

Vendel Bauer, once director and chief organiser of the summer camps in Barcs (a major inspiring force for brass chamber music in Hungary) kindly allowed me to see the complete documentation related to the camps; brochures, summaries, statistics and photographs. Together with reports in *Somogyi Néplap* (Somogy People's Paper) I had enough sources to form an idea about how these camps developed each year and how they became the most important forums in Hungarian brass chamber music in the 1980s.

My thesis also focuses on several brass chamber music pieces by Hungarian composers, complete with detailed analyses of some of those (or parts of them). I received most of the necessary sheet notes from the Szent István Király (King Saint Stephen) Musical Secondary School. Many of those had come from the inheritance of Szabó László Sr., which meant that some of the sheets had hand-written dedications on them, rendering the research material all the more personal to me.

III. Methodology

The first step in writing my thesis was outlining the content. This meant compiling a complete list of Hungarian brass chamber music pieces, using the databases of sheet music publishers, the available lists of composers' published pieces and the help of the Music Information Center at the Budapest Music Center. The list drawn up this way naturally can never be complete; if nothing else, manuscripts and unpublished pieces are missing from it. In addition to the pieces, I made a list of Hungarian brass chamber music ensembles, one that is necessarily incomplete too, as there have been musical formations which existed for only a short time, leaving behind little or no documentation. I did not include school ensembles, except for some instances (such as the aforementioned army school orchestra and a few ensembles at the Liszt Academy). Comparing and analysing the two lists; based on different criteria sorting the one which contains approximately 300 musical pieces, and then observing the appearance and musical activity of different brass chamber ensembles in the examined timeframe gave a comprehensive overview on the topic of my thesis. This method allowed me to make important observations such as the number of pieces written in any given period, the extent of interest on behalf of composers toward brass chamber music in each period, the sphere of influence of an outstanding ensemble, chamber music forum or school on the composers and the whole genre, as well

as how widespread each type of ensemble was at any given point. In the second half of my paper I examine the activity of ensembles, performers, teachers as well as the history of certain forums, pieces linked to them or contemporary pieces. I also incorporated analyses and descriptions of significant, outstanding or characteristic pieces by the most important composers, aiming to show the place of those pieces in the composers' oeuvre. I concentrated particularly on works by István Bogár, Sándor Szokolay, Frigyes Hidas and László Dubrovay as their music (also considerable in volume) is more often played both in schools and brass music concerts.

I strived to summarise the several centuries in brass music leading up to those four decades that my thesis focuses on because brass chamber music in Hungary developed based on the classical repertoire – old tower music, renaissance and baroque pieces – and this has remained so up until today.

IV. Conclusion

Because of my family background I have loved brass chamber music since childhood and during my doctoral years my most serious artistic endeavour was performing in a brass quintet called In Medias Brass. The topic for me thus is personal; I did the necessary research in the field where I am active professionally. My hope was that my thesis

fills a void as there has been no concise study or work on the history of Hungarian brass chamber music so far.

The novelty of my approach lied in not only including ensembles – already treated in other studies – but extending the scope of analysis to composers and brass chamber pieces as well. The interplay of composers and performers was also of interest to me. I have found that the 1970s and 1980s marked a turning point in the modern history of brass chamber music in Hungary in that it was a period when an outstanding array of composers turned to the genre, composing a great number of pieces. It is easy to track how the period after the first two decades, the 1950s and 1960s – which bore witness to a considerable variety in the type of ensembles – gave rise to the prevalence of the sextet due to the influence of Szabó László Sr., especially in the Hungarian People’s Army Musician Warrant Officer Training Vocational Secondary School. Later, from the end of the seventies, with the appearance of the Budapest Brass Quintet, the quintet took over as the most popular type of ensemble. This in turn influenced both the number of pieces and the type of the forming ensembles.

These are the phenomena that were not unknown or new to those who were part of them, but have not been examined and described in writing in their full scope, I believe, up until now.

V. Documentation of the activities connected to the topic of the thesis

Concerts as the member of the In Medias Brass Quintet (members: Kresz Richárd, Nagy Antal Endre – trombita, Benyus János – kürt, Sztán Attila – harsona, ifj. Bazsinka József – tuba):

27th February 2014. 7pm, Old Music Academy, Budapest

Tímea Dragony: Quintet

Péter Zombola: Quintet

György Selmeczi: Hymns 2 (solo: Zsuzsanna Bazsinka, soprano)

Csaba Tűzkő: Hungarian Sonata, 1st movement

Gyula Fekete: Széki Ötös

György Arányi-Aschner: Quintet

Gyula Bánkövi: Brass Segments

Csaba Tűzkő: Balkan Sonata, 3rd movement (Kopanitsa alla rondo)

23rd March 2014. 1pm, Hungarian Radio, Studio No.6:

Tímea Dragony: Quintet

György Selmeczi: Hymns 2 (solo: Zsuzsanna Bazsinka, soprano)

Gyula Bánkövi: Brass Segments

Csaba Tűzkő: Balkan Sonata, 3rd movement (Kopanitsa alla rondo)

Gyula Fekete: Széki Ötös

László Dubrovay: Quintet Nr. 3. 2nd and 3rd movement