

PhD Theses

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Musica Sacra Hungariae:

The History of Cecilianism in Hungary

from 1897 to 1950

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I. Antecedents of the research

I began dealing with the subject of my dissertation as a possible thesis topic in the fall of 2011; however, it soon became clear that this almost undiscovered area of the Hungarian music history is so complex, that its substantive elaboration would require the context of a dissertation. My choice of examining the history of Cecilianism in Hungary had practical reasons. I realized at quite an early stage of my research, that it can be considered a specialty to the effects of this rather complex phenomenon of music history that, unlike in other parts of the world, the provisions made in connection with the movement have left a considerable mark not only in the ecclesiastical, but also in the secular context. Thus, the intention of my dissertation is twofold: to present the history of the movement in Hungary in the international context, and to reveal the effects it has had on the national musical life.

The name of St. Cecilia, who, due to a mistranslation, has been respected as the patron saint of music since the 15th century, rings familiar to many. However, the knowledge about the church music reform movement, called “Cecilianism”, that unfolded at the turn of 19th and 20th century both in Europe and overseas, and that is intertwined with her name, is limited to certain professional circles. The church music ideal of the Romantic era came into being in the midst of philosophical principles, social and political restoration processes, and church regulations.

The contrast between the composer’s credibility and epigonism, simplicity and banality hallmarked the reform aspirations of the 19th-20th century church music, at the center of which stood – uniformly, yet with different emphases – the resuscitation of the Gregorian practice and the vocal polyphony of the 16th century. Remarkable, occasionally perplexing contradictions can be discovered in the French, German and Italian speaking areas, i.e. at every center, where liturgical reformation was initiated by way of reform measures. The differing attitudes of different trends led to the significant division that appeared both in the ideological and in the practical sphere, and which was occasionally perceptible even within one region, as proven by the history of Cecilianism in Hungary.

The cause behind the Cecilian aspirations can be traced back to the –practice, which is, from a liturgical perspective, questionable, within the framework of which, across Europe – thus including the Hungarian church music scene – secular melodies that are unworthy of the liturgical context, e.g. popular operetta and chanson numbers, became included in the sacred practice. The supporters of the reform aspired to solve the problem by compiling an idealized and isolated church music repertoire, that was largely composed of the vocal polyphony

works of the 16th century, hallmarked by Palestrina's name, and the new a cappella pieces that were written in the wake of them. These circumstances, as well as the contradictions of the movement in its ideology and practice, are particularly well exemplified by the studies of James Garratt, Winfried Kirsch, Christoph Lickleder, Karl Gustav Fellerer, Johannes Schwermer and Siegfried Gmeinwieser. They examine the significance of the Palestrina Renaissance and Cecilianism, and their effects on the contemporary church music life from a stylistic-aesthetic viewpoint. In my dissertation, I have aimed at unveiling the contradictions present in the history of the movement in Hungary, relying partly on these works.

II. Sources

Within the examined period I focused first and foremost on revealing the historical background of the aspirations to reform church music modelled on the Bavarian Cecilia-movement. My efforts were greatly facilitated by research expeditions: in the spring of 2013, a two-week trip to Munich within the framework of a TÁMOP-project, and during the winter of 2013/2014, research trips to Munich, Regensburg and Liechtenstein as a KAAD scholarship holder. During this time I researched at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek and the Bischöfliche Zentralbibliothek in Regensburg, amongst others. The examination of the contemporary Bavarian media (*Fliegende Blätter für katholischen Kirchenmusik* and *Musica Sacra*) and their music annexes, supported my hypothesis, according to which the Bavarian Cecilia-movement had remarkably affected the attempts aiming at reforming Hungarian church music.

This is proved by the fact that many important figures of the Hungarian Cecilianism had a personal relationship with a prominent personality of the Bavarian movement. Remarkable examples are József Nitsch (1829-1906) cathedral chapel master, Ignác Glatt (1855-1918) canon and Ferenc Kersch (1853-1910) church choir master, who were in correspondence with Regensburg, the center of the movement. There remained ca. 10,000 letters that are preserved in the Proskesche Musikabteilung, the Proske Legacy of the Bischöfliche Zentralbibliothek in Regensburg. Through the content of these letters the process of the Bavarian aspirations turning into a global reform network reaching overseas can be well reconstructed. According to the letters on file, written by Hungarian church musicians in the period between 1866 and 1903 – within the present-day borders of the country – 45 letters by 27 writers were preserved. However, because the above mentioned interval indicates a period before the Treaty of Trianon, the results of the statistical reports are to be interpreted together with the

data of the countries surrounding today's Hungary.

Based on these sources, however, only the first appearance and initial unfolding of the reform aspirations regarding the Hungarian church music can be reconstructed. As I have mentioned, there has not been a comprehensive study discussing the entire Hungarian history of the movement. The cornerstones of the secondary literature in connection with Cecilianism in Hungary, are five doctoral dissertations, written by Zsuzsanna Domokos, Márton Levente Horváth, Judit Katona-Szabó, Kinga Kemény and Kriszta Köncse. However, the investigation of the effects of Cecilianism are not among the main objectives of any of these works. In these essays, the authors aimed at exploring some of the emblematic figures and artistic products of the movement, such as the life of Ferenc Kersch and Artúr Harmat, the philological analysis of the folk song collection *Szent vagy, Uram!* (*You are holy, my Lord!*), and the mass compositions of the period between 1949 and 1969. Zsuzsanna Domokos' dissertation addressing the effects of the 19th century Palestrina-reception on the art of Liszt, facilitated my understanding of the international network of church music reform aspirations within the examined period; more specifically, the Italian initiatives.

Nonetheless, during my research of the history of Cecilianism in Hungary, I had to work mostly with primary sources: documents of the OMCE (the Hungarian Cecilian Society) Archives – among which hardly any material remained preserved from the period before 1940 due to the historical and political adversities of the past century – and the contemporary Hungarian Cecilian media, i.e. the *Katholikus Egyházi Zeneközlöny* (*Catholic Church Music Gazette*), the *Katholikus Kántor* (*Catholic Cantor*) and the *Magyar Kórus* (*Hungarian Choir*). In order to expand my results beyond the data gained through primary sources, my research carried out at the following institutions was greatly beneficial: the Archives of the Franz Liszt Music Academy, the yearbooks of the Music Academy, the Artúr Harmat Legacy of the Music Collection at the National Széchenyi Library, the Bárdos Archives, and the Archives for 20th-21st Century Hungarian Music of the Institute for Musicology. In addition to the above mentioned, the institutional- and church-music historical studies of Ferenc Kósa and Artúr Harmat, served as a basis in the process of reconstructing the main events of the movement.

III. Research Methods

During my research it unraveled that the Cecilia-movement took its effects on Hungary's musical life in a rather complex manner. Beyond the impulses evident in the liturgical sphere, the Hungarian ambassadors of the movement have left an essential mark on the (church)music

education and general musical life, i.e. on the platforms of concert-life. Significant inferences can be drawn in terms of the stylistic and aesthetic aspects of the new church music repertoire conceived as a result of the Cecilian ideology.

I have aimed at presenting the main characteristics of these compositions and the collected publications containing them with the help of the analytical musical examples of the second main chapter. Through the available media sources, their reception-historical interpretation also came into view. Nevertheless, the music historical significance of Cecilianism, which primarily had an effect on the Hungarian Gregorian-, folk music-, folksong-, and partially on the early music research, is not negligible. Although I mention this issue at several points in my thesis, I could not dedicate an individual chapter to it. The detailed elaboration on this far-reaching topic that expands into the domain of Gregorian- and folk music-research, and that still has an impact today, would have implied a substantial growth on the paper (even to the size of a separate dissertation); thus, I abstained from discussing the topic in an independent chapter. Also due to the extent of the topic, have I forgone the instrument- and repertoire-historical presentation of the organ as an accepted instrument in the Cecilian ideology – although, several points of the dissertation refer to the stylistic features identifiable in connection with the functional use of the instrument during the analytical examination.

IV. Research Results

It became clear that the study of the history of the Cecilia-movement is possible by referring to four main periods in the context of the Hungarian church music life: during the pre-Cecilian period, and the three waves following that, there are different compositional and aesthetical trends that can be separated based on their supporters' connection to the roots of the Bavarian movement. Thus, analyzing the history of Cecilianism in Hungary generated results that extend beyond the exploration of church music in a narrower sense. It revealed information about the stylistic and aesthetic concept of the composers of this era, about the interrelationship of the general musical life internationally and in Hungary, and its history within the everyday church life and press, about the discourses determined by everyday politics, and about the music historical canon that took shape as a result of all of this. In my dissertation, I aspire to present the period marking the first half of the past century of Hungarian music history from another, new aspect.

V. Publications and papers related to the topic of the dissertation

Publications

„A „szent” zene szolgálatában – adalékok a cecilianizmus magyarországi történetéhez.” [In the service of „sacred” music – additions to the Hungarian history of Cecilianism] In: Keresztes, Gábor (ed.): *Tavaszi Szél, 2015.: Konferenciakötet. 3. kötet: Közigazgatástudomány, matematika és informatika, műszaki tudományok, művészet és művészettudomány, nyelvtudomány* [Spring Wind, 2015: Conference volume Vol. 3: Public administration, mathematics and informatics, engineering, art and art, linguistics]. Eger – Budapest: Líceum Kiadó – Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége [Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates], 2015. 501-515.

„»Musica sacra« akkor és most – Maróti Gábor népének feldolgozásai egy egyházzenei reformtörekvés tükrében.” [»Musica Sacra« then and now Gábor Maróti folksong-adaptations in the light of a church music reform efforts] In: Lukácsi, Zoltán – Martos, Levente Balázs (ed.): „... Mert irgalma örökkévaló”. *Tanulmánykötet 2014-2016* [„...His mercy is everlasting.” Study-volume 2016-2016]. Győr: Győri Hittudományi Főiskola, 2016. 27-42.

„A „szent” zene szolgálatában – adalékok a cecilianizmus magyarországi történetéhez.” [In the service of „sacred” music – additions to the Hungarian history of Cecilianism] In: Sepsi, Enikő – Lovász, Irén – Kiss, Gabriella – Faludy, Judit (szerk.): *Vallás és művészet* [Religion and art]. Budapest: Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – L’Harmattan Kiadó, 2016. 356-369.

„»Palestrina felé« A Kodály-életmű ceciliánus reflexióinak nyomában.” [»Towards Palestrina« In the Cecilian Reflections of the Kodály-oeuvre] In: Kálmán, Imre – Karácsony, Tiborné – Szatmár, Beatrix (eds.): *Az Istent szeretőknek minden a javukra válik* [For the lovers of God, all things work for them]. Győr: Brenner János Hittudományi Főiskola, 2019. 83-93.

In preparation:

„»Szent vagy Uram, vagy nem?« A Harmat-Sík népénektár és a korabeli egyházzenei közélet dilemmái.” [»You are holy my Lord, or not?« Dilemmas of the Harmat-Sík song-collection and contemporary church music] In: Dalos, Anna–Ozsvárt, Viktória (eds.): *Járdányi és kora*. Budapest: Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 2020.

Unpublished Conference Papers:

„Gut ist es gegangen, nichts ist geschehen!“ *A cecilianizmus első nyomai Magyarországon a Katholikus Egyházi Zeneközlöny mint korabeli sajtóforrás tükrében.* [„Gut ist es gegangen, nichts ist geschehen!“ The first traces of Cecilianism in Hungary in the light of the *Katholikus Egyházi Zeneközlöny* as a contemporary press source] (4 October, 2013, Budapest, *The past, present and future of source research in Hungarian musicology* – Musicological Conference)

„A „szent” zene szolgálatában – adalékok a cecilianizmus magyarországi történetéhez.” [In the service of „sacred” music – additions to the Hungarian history of Cecilianism] (10 April, 2015, Eger, Spring Wind Conference of Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates and 9 May, 2015, Budapest, Religion and art Conferenc of Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary)

„»Palestrina felé« *A Kodály-életmű ceciliánus reflexióinak nyomában.* [»Towards Palestrina« In the Cecilian Reflections of the Kodály-oeuvre] (28 April, 2017, Budapest, Conference of the Archives and Research Group for 20th-21st Century Hungarian Music and Hungarian Kodály Society on the occasion Zoltán Kodály’s birth 135th and death 50th anniversary)

„Egy egyházzenei reformmozgalom szolgálatában: Halmos László (1909-1997) és a cecilianizmus.” [In the service of a reform movement in church music: László Halmos (1909-1997) and the Cecilianism] (10 November, 2019, Győr, Halmos László-Conference of the Gergely Czuczor Benedictine high school and college)

