

Thesis of a Dissertation

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The Work of the Group 180 (1979–1990)

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I. Antecedents of the Research

Unfortunately, very few studies and writings have been done on the activity and work of the Group 180 (Hungarian: *180-as Csoport*), one of the most successful and acclaimed contemporary music ensemble of the late Kádár period, who enjoyed a legendary reputation, but were considered even more controversial by critics, operating between 1979 and 1990 in the past decades, short critics, articles and reviews were published primarily only in the various Hungarian art magazines - *Muzsika*, *Mozgó Világ*, *a Művészet*, *Balkon*, *Kritika*. These publications can be largely divided into two types: on the one hand, with a few exceptions, the scathing and condemning, in many cases sarcastic, reactions of the official Hungarian music press, and on the other hand, statements coming from the related arts fields - theater, dance, film, visual arts, literature - which are often exaggerated and phrased in superlatives. In the latter, a lack of professional training and a differentiated perspective is common and typical: the journalists who approach from the perspective of pop and rock music do not have the conceptual apparatus to interpret the Group's embedding in classical music, while the classically trained music historians and critics, guided by a kind of elitism, are fundamentally suspicious of the influences coming from pop culture and in relation to the permanent presence of close relations with fellow arts. Hungarian press sources mainly document the Group's connections with opposition circles and other artistic fields, the character of its groundbreaking performances, the special relationship they have with their audience and their interaction with each other, as well as their place and role in the Hungarian subcultural scene (the so-called *Second Publicity*). Apart from the thesis of my supervisor, Anna Dalos (*Popularity and Abstraction*) almost no truly appreciable work has been published in the Hungarian literature regarding the *oeuvre* of the Group 180 and its real research.

II. Sources

Since my writing focuses primarily on the works written by the composer-members of Group 180, I considered the scores and recordings of the pieces to be the primary starting point of my work. It is a regrettable fact that the ensemble's eleven-year creative work has remained unacceptably underrepresented in Hungarian music publishing to this day: the Editio Musica Budapest only published Márta István's *Christmas Day - Lesson 24*, the other four composer's (Béla Faragó, László Melis, András Soós, Tibor Szemző) pieces are still unpublished, in their case I could only work from the author's manuscripts. I was able to supplement the criticisms, reviews, reports and subjective/personal memoirs published in the press with the priceless materials of Ferenc Körmendy,

a member of the band, available in the Artpool Archive and Art Research Center (Hungarian: *Artpool Archívum és Művészeti Kutatóközpont*) under the name "Körmendy Collection". The twenty-nine-page "Group 180 concert and recording list" compiled by Körmendy and András Soós in 2019 was also an invaluable resource, which helped me a lot in all phases of my writing process. I made several interviews with the five composers, followed by long and e-mails and phone conversations during the 2020 pandemic. I had the opportunity to make three other conversations with composer Zoltán Jeney, who had passed away in the meantime, music historian and guitarist Csaba Hajnóczy, and video and multimedia artist Péter Forgács, who was a regular special guest as a reciter at the concerts of the Group.

III. Method

I approached all the compositions with similar analysis methods. First, based on the available sources, I followed the performances of the given work and its significance in the ensemble's repertoire: when and where the world premiere took place, how many additional times it was performed, whether it was recorded on LP or radio broadcasts. In the second step, I researched the sources of inspiration and the creative intentions of the composition: in many cases, the works of the Group's composers operate with very specific systems of fine art, literature or music, and when examining these, I tried to outline the cultural background and associated art references of the given compositions in each case. The third – perhaps the most important – stage was the analysis of the compositions based on purely musical aspects. I described the structure of the pitches, rhythmic characteristics, formal structure, orchestration, the importance of quotations and stylistic allusions of the given work. I have never neglected, when examining the musical elements treated separately, to also try to unravel the compositional elements that result in a complex system of connections between the listed musical factors, the poetic content and creative intention to be expressed. If the starting point of the composition is another piece, I dealt in detail with the transcribing and transformation procedures of the musical material in question. I also checked whether there was a later version of the discussed composition, or whether the author dealt with the problem raised there in his later works. It was an important part of my vision to approach the works not only in the musical and cultural context of their own time when they were made, but also from the perspective of the musical aesthetic discourse that has been continuously forming since then. In this respect, Szitha Tünde's doctoral thesis on the New Music Studio (Hungarian: *Új Zenei Stúdió*), considered one of the most important prototypes of the Group 180, provided important additional informations and details to the topic.

IV. Results

The compositions of the Group 180 - despite the fact that it has unquestionably become one of the legendary and important chapters of Hungarian music history - has not received a thorough professional examination. I considered it important to approach the works not only in the musical and cultural context of their own time – as I said, but also from the perspective of the musical aesthetic discourse that has been continuously forming since then. The common cliché that this group of works covers the works of "Hungarian repetitive music" only proves that these compositions have not really been evaluated on the basis of their own value, their individual questions and the answers given to them, but primarily in relation to the repertoire played by the ensemble. They tried to approach and interpret it from the point of view of their position and the lines of power formed by them. After a thorough examination of the works, I came to the conclusion that most of the works created in the Group's work can be considered valid works not only at the eighties – when they were made, but also today, and are a „lost chapter” in the history of Hungarian contemporary music, which awaits new discovery. My work may help to start this renaissance.

V. Documentation of the Activities Relevant to the Topic of the Dissertation

My first public performance related to the topic of my dissertation was on the 20th of October 2019, at the Hungarian Institute of Musicology's conference on the Hungarian Political Changes in 1989–1990, where I gave a lecture on László Melis's cantata *Mulomedicina Chironis (The Mule-therapy of Chiron)*. In 2022, the Prae Publishing concluded a contract with me to publish my dissertation as a book. The book released in September 2023. Since then, there have been several positive reviews about it, and finally I had a successful book presentation-event on the 19th of January 2024 , at the Transparent Sound New Music Festival (Hungarian: *Átlátszó Hang Újzenei Fesztivál*), at the BMC Music Information Center and Library. The event was moderated by music historian Gergely Fazekas, and at the end of the evening, former members of the Group 180 performed the wonderful piece of László Melis, *The Ceremony*.