

Theses of the DLA dissertation

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Three Approaches to Sándor Veress's *Hommage à Paul Klee*,
Fantasy for Two Pianos and String Orchestra

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I. Antecedents to the research

The oeuvre of Sándor Veress (1907–1992) has by now generated a relatively substantial body of scholarly literature, due primarily to international musicological reception in Switzerland and the English-speaking world. Foundational frameworks for this research have been provided by the 1982 volume of studies edited by János Demény, Ede Terényi and Melinda Berlász; István Csicsery-Rónay's volume of autobiographical interviews; Andreas Traub's collection of Veress's correspondence and writings (1998); and the stylistic and biographical studies of Doris Lanz, Thomas Gerlich and Rachel Beckles Willson. Nevertheless, these works generally address the first years of Veress's Swiss exile, including the genesis of *Hommage à Paul Klee* (1951), only briefly. The political and biographical background to the work's composition—particularly the impact of the Rajk trial of 1949, Veress's decision to emigrate, and the role played by his relationship with the Widmann and Sacher families—has not previously been reconstructed in a coherent account based on archival and epistolary sources.

Research into the visual-musical aspects of the work is similarly incomplete. Although Andrew Kagan and Werner Haftmann have examined the question of Paul Klee's musicality in detail, and Veress's own programme note identifies three principal types of relationship between the seven movements and the seven Klee paintings, this authorial classification has not previously been subjected to a detailed movement-by-movement musical analysis. Ede Terényi's stylistic study (1982) addresses formal questions in selected movements of the

Hommage, but it does not systematically develop the visual-musical parallels, nor does it trace musical characters and motives across movements.

Finally, and most significantly, the work has not previously been the subject of comparative performance analysis. Since its premiere in 1952, three commercial recordings of the Hommage have been released: the composer's own 1960 recording with Ilse von Alpenheim; the 1998 recording by András Schiff and Dénes Várjon, conducted by Heinz Holliger; and the 2005 recording by the GrauSchumacher Piano Duo. No earlier study has compared these recordings from a performance-oriented perspective while also taking account of the work's visual world.

II. Sources

Among the primary sources of the dissertation, particular importance is attached to Sándor Veress's unpublished or difficult-to-access authorial writings: the English-language typescript programme note for Hommage à Paul Klee, preserved in the Veress estate held by Melinda Berlász, and the statement entitled *Komponisten-Selbstportrait*, which may be regarded as a formulation of the composer's artistic creed. Further primary sources include manuscript copies from the Veress estate held by Melinda Berlász: the 1990 correspondence between Veress and János Demény; Veress's letters to Colin Mason and Anna Müller-Widmann, which illuminate the background to his decision to emigrate in 1949; and Max Favre's 1952 premiere review, surviving as a typescript copy.

Yehudi Menuhin's 1960 letter to Veress is also of particular source value as an early document of the work's international reception.

The dissertation also draws on the volume Veress Sándor. Tanulmányok [Sándor Veress: Studies] (1982), edited by Melinda Berlász, János Demény and Ede Terényi; István Csicsery-Rónay's documentary and interview volume Veress Sándor (2007); and the international Veress literature, primarily in German and English, including studies by Doris Lanz, Thomas Gerlich, Rachel Beckles Willson and Patrick Müller. The theoretical framework for the examination of Klee reception is provided by the monographs of Andrew Kagan, Werner Haftmann and Régine Bonnefoit, as well as Roland Barthes's study on the rhetoric of the image.

The musical sources include the score of the work and the three published recordings: the 1960 recording by Sándor Veress and Ilse von Alpenheim with the Beromünster Radio Orchestra, conducted by Antal Doráti; the 1998 recording by András Schiff and Dénes Várjon with the Budapest Festival Orchestra, conducted by Heinz Holliger; and the 2005 recording by the GrauSchumacher Piano Duo with Camerata Bern, conducted by Erich Höbarth. The author's correspondence with Ilse von Alpenheim in 2023, which contains a previously unpublished recollection of the rehearsal process, also forms part of the source base.

III. Method

Given the multifaceted nature of *Hommage à Paul Klee*—as the composer himself emphasizes in the introduction to the dissertation—the

work cannot be approached through a single, exclusive methodology. The dissertation therefore employs three complementary perspectives: a visual-musical approach, an analytical approach, and a performance-interpretative approach. Together, these form the tripartite structure of the study.

The visual-musical chapter takes as its point of departure Veress's own programme note, which divides the seven movements into three categories: movements in which the construction of the painting provides the basis for a musical construction; movements in which the spiritual experience offered by the painting is projected into music; and the central movement, which realizes the line as a general graphic-musical element in sound. This framework is supplemented by Roland Barthes's concepts of image rhetoric and by scholarship on Klee reception, especially the work of Kagan, Haftmann and Bonnefoit. The relevant Klee paintings are introduced through brief, personally oriented commentaries.

The analytical chapter pursues, on the one hand, a reconstruction of the work's genesis based on archival and epistolary sources; on the other, it offers a movement-by-movement formal and motivic analysis. In selected movements, this analysis draws on Veress's compositional principle formulated in *Komponisten-Selbstportrait*: the idea that the macrocosm of form unfolds from the microcosm of a motive. The chapter identifies musical characters, formal structures and motivic relationships that have not previously been examined in this context, including musical allusions to Bartók's Third Piano Concerto and to the "eszi-szedi" motive from *Cipósütés* [Bread Baking].

The methodology of the interpretative chapter is twofold. First, it examines movement by movement the work's chamber-music character—its equality among instruments in contrast to the more soloistic hierarchy of concerto tradition. Second, it provides a personal comparative analysis of the three published recordings. This approach combines the visual-musical relationships discussed in the preceding chapters with musicological analysis and the practical experience of a performing musician.

IV. Results

The choice of topic was grounded in a personal formative experience: the author first encountered Veress's distinctive musical language while accompanying his songs as a teenager, and later had opportunities to perform several of his piano works. *Hommage à Paul Klee* is one of the best-known and most frequently performed works in Veress's oeuvre; nevertheless, no comprehensive study has previously united a visual-musical reading, detailed musical analysis and performance interpretation. The work was therefore particularly suitable as the subject of the present research, since its interpretative layers extend far beyond the sonic material itself and lead both listener and researcher towards visual-musical and historical dimensions.

The results of the dissertation may be regarded as new in three areas. First, taking Veress's own programme note and its threefold grouping of the movements as a point of departure, the dissertation demonstrates

movement by movement how the non-figurative elements of the Klee paintings may be interpreted in the musical material. These include the mosaic-like melodic fragments of *Zeichen in Gelb*; the modal scales and Baroque-like ornamentation evoking the richness of colour in *Alter Klang*; the stone-like recurring motives in *Steinsammlung*; and the textures of *Feuerwind*, which suggest distance and a sense of danger. This visual analysis also seeks specific musical connections with other works by Veress, including the similarly visually inspired *Tre Quadri* and the string-percussion concept of the *String Trio*.

Second, on the basis of archival and epistolary materials, the dissertation reconstructs in detail the political and biographical background to the genesis of the work: the shock caused by the Rajk trial of 1949; the gradual, documentable process leading to Veress's decision to emigrate; and the material and moral support of the Müller-Widmann and Sacher families during Veress's Swiss new beginning and the composition of the *Hommage*. From an analytical perspective, the dissertation presents new motivic relationships: the recurrence across movements of a leading motive derived from the opening major-seventh chord, as well as previously undocumented Bartók allusions in *Feuerwind*, including references to the Third Piano Concerto and to the motive from *Cipósütés*.

Third, the interpretative chapter constitutes the first scholarly comparative analysis of all three published recordings—Veress–Alpenheim, Schiff–Várjon and Grau–Schumacher. This chapter synthesizes visual analysis, analytical findings and performance practice.

Building on the results of the preceding chapters, it shows how performance may become an authentic medium for articulating the work's visual-musical and motivic relationships.

V. Documentation of Activities Related to the Subject of the Dissertation

During and prior to the doctoral studies, the author performed several significant works by Sándor Veress. The works of Béla Bartók also contributed substantially to an understanding of the stylistic features of Veress's compositions, particularly those written during his first compositional period.

Selected Concerts, Performances and Recordings

12. October 2012 – Sándor Veress: József Attila Songs, Canti Ceremissi. Balassi Institute, Bucharest. Performers: Edith Borsos (mezzo-soprano), Balázs Demény (piano).

15–20 January 2012 – Sándor Veress: József Attila Songs, Canti Ceremissi. Palace of Culture, Târgu Mureș; Town Hall, Odorheiu Secuiesc; Remetea, Romania. Performers: Edith Borsos (mezzo-soprano), Balázs Demény (piano).

10 April 2014 – Béla Bartók: Piano Concerto No. 3. Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, Budapest. Dohnányi Orchestra, conductor: Gábor Hollerung. Soloist: Balázs Demény (piano).

11 September 2014 – Béla Bartók: Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion. Hanns Eisler School of Music, Berlin. Performers: Väinö

Jalkanen and Balázs Demény (pianos); Ni Fan and Lukas Böhm (percussion).

2016 – BMC Records recording: Béla Bartók: Sonata (1926); Béla Bartók: Out of Doors. Performer: Balázs Demény (piano).

18 June 2016 – Piano recital featuring works by Franz Liszt, Béla Bartók and Sándor Veress. Kammersaal, Universität der Künste Berlin. Works by Veress: Hommage to Wales, Sonatina. Performer: Balázs Demény (piano).

3 February 2022 – Recital: Sándor Veress: Sonata for Cello and Piano. Dinu Lipatti Philharmonic, Bucharest. Performers: Előd Zágoni (cello), Balázs Demény (piano).

10–15 April 2022 – Rehearsal and research process: Sándor Veress: Hommage à Paul Klee. Charles Rosen Ensemble, Theater am Delphi, Berlin. Conductor: Michael-Cohen Weissert. Performers: On-Yee Yan and Balázs Demény (pianos).

Scholarly Presentations and Conferences

5–6 October 2018 – “The Transmission of Tradition: In the Spirit of the Creative Legacy of Kodály, Bartók, Dohnányi, Veress and Ligeti.” Conference presentation, Cluj-Napoca.

Professional Exhibition Visit

23 February–12 May 2018 – Paul Klee – Musik und Theater in Leben und Werk [Paul Klee: Music and Theatre in Life and Work]. Galerie Thomas, Munich.