

Thesises

György Déri

The Analysis of Twentieth-century and Contemporary Hungarian

Cello Solo Pieces

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1 The Antecedents of Research

The history of the analysis of musical compositions established itself as a field of received scholarship in the 19th century, though in certain forms it had existed since the Middle Ages. The biographical, historical and stylistic elements became an integral part of music theories – which principally dealt with musical rhetoric and modal scales – with the birth of romanticism and its concept of the genius (J. N. Forkel, *Über Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke*, 1802). But the formal analysis only reached equal significance in the mid-19th century by introducing, for example, the sonata form into the scholarly discourse (A. B. Marx, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*, 1837–47). This approach reached its climax at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the work done by Riemann and Schenker.

My dissertation, however, does not use this approach in dealing with the four pieces I have chosen as my subject matter. My aim has been to apply a procedure which, though not without antecedents, probably has not been employed in this form yet: I demonstrate the learning of a musical composition almost exclusively from the viewpoint of a performer preparing for a

concert. Ernő Lendvai's early work is the closest equivalent but, in contrast, I did not aim to create a system of general, textbook-like knowledge. Instead, I have attempted to describe a pronouncedly singular and subjective process, which is meaningful for others only as long as it is made clear how wide the confines of preparing for a new piece are; how difficult it is to restrict one's thoughts; and that accidental errors are also inalienably part of the process.

The end result is certainly not perfect, since I did not start dealing with the pieces while writing the present dissertation. I have known some of them for decades, while I had learned others just a year before the sound recording was made – so I had to rely on my reminiscences. Due to the descriptive nature of this dissertation it was difficult to reproduce how a concept or an idea is created – which is partly conscious, unconscious and associative, and is partly predetermined by earlier studies. My aim has been to show the emotional depths behind the musical sounds, and the emotional charge behind my words is intended to be the same as the emotional energy behind the tones of the performed piece. I have called this descriptive process a “practical analysis.”

2 Sources

I have acquired two of the four pieces from published music sheets (Ligeti, Rózsa) and two from the composer's manuscripts (Kurtág, Eötvös). These sheets were my primary sources in my analysis. The primary source of the analytical parts in my Introduction is *A mű önazonossága és az elemzés kockácata* [The Self-identity of the Art Work and the Risks of Interpretation] by Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, a study which discusses encouragingly similar problems in music and literature. The historical background attempts to give an overall picture in the absence of works specifically devoted to strings solo pieces, with particular emphasis on creating a uniform approach to the complex relationships between music history, the history of musical instruments, history, the history of ideas and the performing arts. My primary source and inspiration has been the essay *Előadóművészet és zenei köznyelv* [Performing Arts and the Language of Music] by András Pernye. Other relevant information has been retrieved from CD booklets, especially those of the recordings of early baroque strings solo pieces (Julius Berger, *The Birth of the Cello*; Mira Glodenau, *L'art du violon seul dans l'Allemagne baroque*). In the analytical part I did not have specific sources at my disposal due to the temporal proximity of the pieces,

but since a performer often faces similar problems when preparing for a concert, associations of other art forms – principally literature, but also the cinema and the visual arts – can play a crucial part in the practical interpretation of a musical piece. Last but not least, I used the following helpful sources in my analysis of the individual pieces: Péter Eötvös's rehearsals of and lectures about his *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams*; Miklós Perényi's reminiscences of his conversations with György Ligeti about the performance of *Solo Sonata*; and my own conversations on performing art with András Kemenes.

3 Methods

The kind of analysis which aims to show the acquisition of a new piece from the perspective of the performer is a novel approach by definition. The closest equivalent, as mentioned above, is Ernő Lendvai's early work, though again I wish to emphasise that the intention of generalisation has been beyond me in this analysis.

My main intention in writing this dissertation has been to chart and describe the process of practising with or without the instrument; the projection of the performer's general knowledge

onto the structure of the piece to be performed; the unique alloy of already known performing modes and styles before the first performance; and the specific situation of a performer before a concert or the finals of a competition. As this type of analysis naturally needs to be accompanied by music, I attached the compact disc recording of the discussed musical pieces (Hungaroton HCD 32288, 2004).

As a result, my methods stand probably closest to the attempts of New Criticism, which “tried not to acknowledge the biographical and historical background, and wished to suggest that it was possible to interpret poems outside temporality.” I tried to describe the process in which I familiarise myself with the formal, harmonial and emotional make-up of a work through a physical contact with it; and in which energy from the sounds and tones of the piece create the structure of the performed piece, almost by themselves, both for the performer and the audience.

The practical analysis is the procedure when we prepare a specific piece for performance; when we filter its sounds, rhythms, motifs, themes, tempi, dynamisms, harmonies and formal structure through our sense perception; and when we analyse, understand and

learn its visible, audible, tangible and performable components. Thus, a practical analysis is, by definition, subjective, though every performer likes to flatter himself by saying that this extreme subjectivity helps the audience find the way to the universal.

4 Results

My approach is primarily that of the musical performer with the soundest possible knowledge in harmonics, musical form, musical history and composing. I chose this method to find the golden mean between the merely technical acquisition of a piece and an interpretation independent of the concert hall performance. It is the practical analysis that leads to the creation of one's performing style: that is its justification and also its chief merit. All musical performers do a practical analysis before the actual performance – whatever the quality and whatever it is called. My dissertation has made an attempt to describe this process, which has interested me for a long time. So, whatever its merit, I believe my attempt is innovative enough and has reached its purpose in giving a glimpse into an individual performer's way of thinking, since this approach is anything but common, especially due to the increasingly distancing specificities of the various activities.

5 Documentation

All the pieces analysed in the present dissertation have been performed twice by the present author: first, on 13th July 2003 in the Szombathely Art Gallery at the International Bartók Seminar and Festival, together with a talk on the pieces; second, on 2nd November 2003 in the Budapest “Kultiplex” at the Budapest Autumn Festival. The CD called *Á la Carte* has been recorded at Hungaroton Studios in 2004 (Hungaroton HCD 32288, 2004).