

Thesis for DLA dissertation

György Éder

Hungarian cellists of the 20th century

Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Egyetem

28.számú művészet- és közművelődéstörténeti

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Background and topic selection

I selected this particular topic for two main reasons. Although several books have been published in foreign languages about great foreign cello players, there are hardly any publications about the history of violoncello and violoncello players in Hungary. Portraits by Béla Csuka, Ágnes Gádor's Popper-study, and writings by Miklós Rakos and János Breuer provide indeed interesting yet not enough information about the history of this wonderful instrument in our country. My younger fellow musicians know very little about famous violoncello players of the previous century, and therefore I decided to collect all relevant data and information about the history of violoncello and outstanding players of this instrument in Hungary.

The other reason was to commemorate the lifework of Vera Dénes and Ede Banda, two outstanding musicians of the 1950's and 1960's in Hungary. No book or study has so far presented their biography, lifework and achievements, and I thought it was worthwhile to assume this challenging task.

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Method

In my research I first determined the structure and main chapters of the dissertation. In the introduction to Part 1 I present the antecedents in the 19th century and give a brief description of characters not covered in the independent article. The main part describes how the Popper school evolved and its key followers. Selection of characters was based, apart from their success as solo musicians, on international recognition and success as chamber musicians and music teachers. I looked for relevant data and information in foreign books, reports, program guides, music academy documents, memoirs of fellow musicians, and personal interviews. After collecting and processing the data and information, I presented the characters in order of birth.

For Part 2, I extended the data collection method to include legacy of the families, details found in concert booklets, magazine articles and reviews. To make biographies more ‘real’ and entertaining, I gave more emphasis to interviews with family members, fellow musicians and pupils.

The appendix features rare audio and photographic materials.

Results of the research

As a result of my research I compiled the first comprehensive study about the history of violoncello in Hungary. Knowing the history and great musicians who played the instrument of our choice is indispensable for us, professional musicians, because the expertise and knowledge we have today is mostly based on their lifework. This is a unique and long-awaited read, targeted mainly at violoncello players but also interesting for music collectors and lay audiences interested in violoncello, that fills many gaps and offers new and valuable insight into the history of this instrument. Processing of the lifework of Vera Dénes and Ede Banda required complex research. I believe I succeeded in presenting their biography in detail, with the stages of their career and key areas of their activities, e.g. their work as concert soloists, chamber musicians, orchestra members, and teachers. I quoted their own words to describe their creed and principles, and used excerpts and information from interviews to illustrate their character and personality.

Experience of the author related to the subject matter of the dissertation

After graduating at the Franz Liszt Music Academy in Budapest, I worked as principal cellist of the Hungarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and later the Budapest Festival Orchestra. As founding member of the Éder String Quartet I won two international contests, in 1976 (Evian) and 1977 (Munich). I have been a member of the Kodály String Quartet since 1997. I have recorded over 40 LPs and CDs, including but not limited to records of all string quartets by Bartók, Mozart and Shostakovich, and many string quartets by Beethoven and Schubert. During my studies and concerts abroad, I made many acquaintances with Hungarian musicians, violoncello players living abroad, and heard many interesting stories that awoke my interest in the subject. Ede Banda was my highly esteemed professor at the Franz Liszt Music Academy in Budapest.