

Thesis of a DLA Dissertation

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Alfred Schnittke's Works for Violin

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28. Doctoral School of Arts and Cultural History

Budapest

2011

## I. The Antecedents of the Research

The international literature on Alfred Schnittke is very extensive, several books have been published on him already in his lifetime, the last eight years before his death,<sup>1</sup> and the case is the same today with scientific writings dealing with his works.

During my research, I met two conspicuous deficiencies. The first was that in contrast with his international prestige, Schnittke, this very fertile and original composer, who is particularly focusing on the violin in numerous of his compositions, is almost entirely unknown in Hungary. The second is that in even in foreign literature no work has never been published which summarizes or reviews Schnittke's violin works; only a few studies touch upon some of his works composed for the violin.<sup>2</sup> My dissertation is an attempt to recover these deficiencies.

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<sup>1</sup> Valentina Kholopova and Evgenia Chigareva: *Alfred Schnittke* (Moscow: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1990)

<sup>2</sup> For example: Fíona Héarún-Javakhishvili: „The co-existence of tonality and dodecaphony in Schnittke's First Violin Sonata: their crystallisation within a cyclic structure.” and Paul Westwood: „Schnittke's Violin Sonata No. 2 as an open commentary on the composition of modern music”. in: George Odam (ed.):

## II. Resources

For the description and analysis of the works, I have first and foremost relied on the scores and Schnittke's own explanations of his pieces.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Alexander Ivashkin's very detailed biographical writing<sup>4</sup> has been a great help to me, which also submits a list of Schnittke's works until 1996,<sup>5</sup> as well as his collection which includes Schnittke's studies written on 20<sup>th</sup> century music, and summarizes Ivashkin's personal conversations with the

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*Seeking the Soul the Music of Alfred Schnittke*. (London: The Guildhall School of Music & Drama, 2002), 67-77, 46-56.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Schnittke: „Werkübersicht”. In: Jürgen Köchel, Hans-Ulrich Duffek, Helmut Peters, Ulrike Patow, Mark Heyer (szerk.) *Alfred Schnittke zum 60. Geburtstag – Eine Festschrift*. (Hamburg: Hans Sikorski, 1994), 77-134.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Ivashkin: *Alfred Schnittke* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996)

<sup>5</sup> A complete list of works is Onno van Rijen's catalogue, violin works did not originate after 1994.

composer.<sup>6</sup> My description of Polystylism is mainly based on Schnittke's own study.<sup>7</sup>

### III. Methods

In the first chapter of my work I try to present the composer as a person since through his personality we can get even closer to his works. Biographical data and a list of Schnittke's most important works can be found in the Appendix. In the second chapter, first, the development and evolution of the composer's style are discussed, and then Polystylism is presented as a method of what characterizes the composer's mature oeuvre, which is also typical of his works composed for the violin. In the third chapter, divided into subsections, I explore the four Schnittke Violin Concertos, the four

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<sup>6</sup> Alexander Ivashkin (szerk.): *A Schnittke Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002)

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Schnittke: „Polystylistic Tendencies in Modern Music”. In: Alexander Ivashkin (ed.): *A Schnittke Reader*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 87-90.

Sonatas for Violin and Piano, and some of his other shorter violin pieces. I focus on different issues when discussing different pieces, trying to capture the most important feature of the individual works, so we can obtain a comprehensive picture about the works written for the violin. In the fourth chapter, I summarize the problems, the technical requirements of the works, and in the final chapter, I give an overview of some of Schnittke's friendships with violinists who have played a significant role in his personal and professional life.

### IV. Results

I have got in touch with Alfred Schnittke's works during my post-graduate studies in Graz, when I was inspired by my teacher starting to deal with one of Schnittke's Sonatas for Violin. I was attracted by the area that was completely unknown to me and I tried to learn more about the author and his works. Beside the musical value of the works Schnittke's personality, his thoughts on life and on composing also touched me, and as I understood the moral and spiritual content behind his works more, I came to the realization that his violin pieces deserve more attention, especially in Hungary.

In this dissertation, we can follow Schnittke's development as a composer through his compositions for violin throughout 41 years, between the Fugue for Solo Violin written in 1953 and the Sonata No. 3, written in 1994.<sup>8</sup> Each of the four sonatas represents a different creative period of the composer, while the violin concertos a fifth one, since they were written only at a late period of the composer. Almost all of the shorter compositions are occasional pieces; they are related to an event of the composer's life or connected to a specific inspiration.

Books and dissertations have dealt with Schnittke's life, his Polystylism, one of his Cello Sonatas, String Quartet No. 4, and his late works,<sup>9</sup> also, there are some studies about his Violin Sonatas

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<sup>8</sup> This is his fourth sonata in order, the first sonata was found only after his death, then it got its name *Sonata 1955*.

<sup>9</sup> For example: Johannes Kleinmann: *Polystylistic Features of Schnittke's Cello Sonata (1978)*. DMA Dissertation, University of North Texas, 2010;

Aaminah Durrani: *Chorale and Canon in Alfred Schnittke's Fourth String Quartet*. PhD Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 2005

Maria Kostakeva: *Im Strom der Zeiten und der Welten. Das Spätwerk von Alfred Schnittke*. (Saarbrücken: PFAU-Verlag, 2005)

No. 1 and 2,<sup>10</sup> but none of the works have dealt with Schnittke's pieces for violin still as a whole until now. When I was writing my dissertation, I have been more and more ascertained that this very extensive topic offers a number of areas which are worthwhile for further cognition and meditation, and I hope that the work that I have started will be continued in the future.

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<sup>10</sup> See the 2. Note.

## **V. Documentation of Activities Related to the Topic of the Dissertation**

The Hungarian premier of the original version of Schnittke's Violin Sonata No. 1 as well as the Suite in Old Style took place performed by pianist József Gábor and myself at the University Concert Hall of Győr on the 23th of September, 2011, coupled with J.S. Bach's Solo Sonatain no. 1 in G Minor, BWV 1001 and Igor Stravinsky's Duo Concertante.

My further plans include fitting the other Schnittke sonatas to my concert programs, and also, popularizing Schnittke's works during my teaching activity.