

Thesis of DLA dissertation

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Howard Hanson – His Life’s Work and Symphonic Artistry

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I. The Antecedents of the Research

My dissertation, concerning its relatedness to preceding musicological literature, is quite heterogeneous. For this reason, before introducing the related literature, first I have to reveal the different segments, sub-topics of my work. The dissertation can be divided into four basic segments:

1. Showing the historical background of Howard Hanson’s musical activity, regarding both its antecedents and its contemporary circumstances
2. Introducing Howard Hanson’s life’s work through his biography, from all the important aspects of his musical activities
3. Detailed analysis of Hanson’s style as a music composer
4. Motivic and structural analysis of Hanson’s Symphony No. 5.

Regarding these main four segments, the amount and quality of the related musicological literature is significantly uneven. While the topics of the first two segments are covered by a relatively rich variety of sources, in the case of the third and fourth ones I could rely almost exclusively upon my own observations.

1. The first main segment of the dissertation, being a short overview of the American music history before and during Hanson's presence, serves as a sort of introduction to the discussion of his life and music. Regarding the fact that in Hungary we know rather little about the music history of the 19th Century America – and also the 20th Century America concerning the Neo-Romantics –, and furthermore, that all this information can significantly help the understanding and appreciation of Hanson's work, I felt necessary that such an introductory part be written, even if it had to cover such a large portion of time and space.

Music history of a continent and one and a half century being the subject, the literature available is huge: mapping it in its entirety, in addition to its being unnecessary, it's almost impossible as well. That's why, for me in order to write this merely introductory segment, it was enough to find one or two authentic resources the own aim of which is the global summarization of the topic.

2. For giving an overview of the life of Howard Hanson himself, naturally I had to do a more profound research on the available resources. I could come to a favorable conclusion: about Hanson's work nowadays plenty of information is at our disposal. In the past decades numerous articles, essays and books have been published, from which one can acquire more than enough material for the production of a meaningful Hanson-biography. Among these resources, several books exist the main focus of which is Hanson himself: such is for example James E. Perone's summary entitled *Howard Hanson. A Bio-Bibliography*, Vincent A. Lenti's book *Serving a Great and Noble Art. Howard Hanson and the Eastman School of Music*, or Allen Cohen's scholarly book *Howard Hanson in Theory and Practice*, which, although it has Hanson's own harmony theory in its primary focus, it provides a remarkably detailed and colorful summary of Hanson's life's work, with exact references to musicological literature all the way through.

Regarding that this topic is well processed already, in my own work I could not set the goal to expand the knowledge on this area – not even if this segment belongs to the essential part of my dissertation. Here I felt that my task is merely to create a well organized summary of Howard Hanson's life and work, preferably both essence-oriented and diversified in nature – relying upon the resources mentioned above.

3 & 4. Both the discussion of Hanson's style as a music composer and the detailed analysis of his Symphony No. 5 have been created almost in 100 percents without using any external sources. Prior to my work I have made a brief self-orientation on the existing literature, and this time I did not find any paper which would provide an interpretation of the composer's symphonic artistry on such a degree of detail.

II. Resources

1. As my primary resource for the introductory chapter discussing the historical background, I chose Barrymore Laurence Scherer's book *A History of American Classical Music* (Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks, 2007.) The author summarizes the American music history

from the 1500's up to our present day, with such a wide angle of view and such a rich detail, which provides far more than enough information for writing this chapter.

2. As my dominant resource for the chapter presenting Hanson's biography and life's work, I chose the book *Howard Hanson in Theory and Practice* by Allen Cohen (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004. /Contributions to the Study of Music and Dance. 66./). In addition, of valuable help were for me Vincent A. Lenti's *Serving a Great and Noble Art. Howard Hanson and the Eastman School of Music*, David Russell Williams's unique and irreplaceable work entitled *Conversations with Howard Hanson*, in which the author publishes his personal conversations with the then elderly Hanson, and James E. Perone's study entitled *Howard Hanson. A Bio-Bibliography*, which provides a full and comprehensive summary about all known factual data (discography, bibliography, performance-history etc.) related to Hanson's musical activities.

In addition to the papers mentioned above, I could assimilate some valuable supplementary information from Walter Simmons's book *Voices in the Wilderness. Six American Neo-Romantic Composers*, from music theory book *Harmonic Materials of Modern Music* by Howard Hanson himself, and from „Cultivating a Climate for Creativity” (*Music Educator's Journal*, 46/6; June-July 1960.), one of his countless articles and essays published over the decades.

The used literature of books and articles were complemented in a remarkably favorable way by those highly illustrative pieces of information which I could retrieve from accompanying booklets of prominent commercial CD recordings of Hanson's works. Even though these can not be considered as scientific papers in nature, still – keeping in mind that such booklets are traditionally written by competent music historians or specialized journalists -- they can be treated as genuine auxiliary sources.

From among such CD booklets I used, may be highlighted *Howard Hanson, American Romantic*, the comprehensive recording of Hanson's all symphonies issued in a box set by *Delos* in 1992 (Seattle Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Gerard Schwarz), and *Hanson Conducts Hanson – Symphonies 1 & 2, Song of Democracy* published by *Mercury Records*.

3. For the chapter discussing Hanson's musical style – while a few short quotations from the aforementioned sources are inserted here as well at some points – I used nothing else than the printed scores and audio recordings of the music to be analyzed.

4. For the chapter containing the analysis of Hanson's Symphony No. 5, I used no external sources.

Regarding resource-usage, it is yet to be remarked that even though I possess Allen Cohen's *Howard Hanson in Theory and Practice* which focuses on identifying the marks of Hanson's own harmony theory in his compositions and so exploring the correlations between his theory and compositional writing, my dissertation does not apply this kind of approach at all, and thus, from this aspect it does not use this book as a source.

III. Methods

In the chapter containing the analysis of Hanson's style as a composer, the grouping of information from several aspects plays a fundamental role. After outlining the general composer's portrait, I dedicate separate sub-chapters to the brief review of the most important works of the composer, to the survey of the main influences and inspirational sources that shaped his style, to the identification of some marks of national character in his music, and later, separate sub-chapters are dealing with his harmonic language, melodic world, polyphonic voice-shaping habits and miscellaneous musical phenomena I believe to be characteristic of him. After this, I expose Hanson's motivic technique to some critical inspection, noting both the strengths and – I believe sometimes observable – weaknesses of the Hansonian melodic processes in time.

Attempting to think in terms of an integrative picture, at some points I try to put Hanson's life and music into each other's context, with the hope of showing some signs of the interaction between the two.

In the chapter analyzing Hanson's 5th Symphony, not only didn't I look for other analyses of the work, but I also decided not to rely upon any external resource dealing with music analysis in general. My goal setting was here to create a detailed motivic and structural analysis in such a way that I take exclusively the music itself as my source – knowing only its score and audio recording. The methodology, strategy and terminology of this has been created so that the analysis be as fitting as possible to illustrate the content of this concrete piece in a hopefully both exact and essence-oriented way. During my work process, the *types* of motives and structural units – as the “templates” applied for the analysis – have been defined with the allowance of individual approach, notwithstanding, with the utmost insistence to the laws of logic.

IV. Results

My choice of topic has been inspired mostly by the unexplored state of the American Romantic musical art in Hungary. Hearing famous American filmscores, the question was formed several times in my mind: behind all this, what kind of artistic values and curiosities may the American classical musical repertory have in store for the European musical explorer? Within this, I became interested in the birth and development process of this world as well: while in the 19th Century Europe the many hundred years old, robust musical heritage had to be only continued and renewed by the young generations of composers, in America in the very same period they had to literally create something out of nothing.

The size restrictions of the DLA dissertation, however, demanded that the topic be narrowed to one specific composer, the musical personality of whom I can present in a more detailed fashion, becoming able to accomplish a more individual, “self-supporting” work. Thus became the choice Howard Hanson, who – beside that his music was sympathetic to me – grabbed my attention because he had played a central role in the United States for several

decades in promoting and popularizing contemporary American music composition and in raising the quality and sociological prestige of the classical musical culture of his country.

Hanson's merits are incomparably greater than to what one may infer from the very little (practically no) notoriousness of his name in Hungary – and also, supposably, in Europe accordingly. This gave me the primary drive to write this dissertation which may serve as some supplement for our domestic musicological knowledge.

As far as the degree of novelty of my work is concerned, it's obvious that it will be considered the smallest in the United States – however, in Hungary, it can be regarded 100 per cents. Considering that Hanson *as a composer* is currently not a central figure neither in the international, nor in the American musical life, I did not feel the need to widely explore and map all the existing research papers analyzing his style – for three concrete reasons:

1. Even in case it had eluded my attention that there already existed a paper which focused on a similar topic as mine, I believe it is *impossible* that they get into such a great degree of redundancy that they make each other superfluous. Considering the 120 page overall volume of my chapters analyzing musical composition, and the fact that during such a work, in addition to objective statements, numerous subjective-personal elements get mixed into the picture (especially the way information are grouped, prioritized, interlinked and how the artistic essence behind them is seen and then worded) it is natural and inevitable that an individual approach and unique internal purport evolves. For an unintended plagiarism, an entirely absurd series of coincidences would be needed.
2. Even if some papers written in English might exist which partially cover the contents of mine, it can clearly be seen that in the Hungarian literature no document exists about Howard Hanson, furthermore, not even about several other related topics featured in my work. Thus, this dissertation conveys novelty nearly in its entirety for Hungarian readers, which, in addition to presenting the life and work of Hanson, may direct their attention to a great new field of discovery: the world of the 19th and 20th Century American Romanticism.
3. Finally, my paper, compared to the possibly existing American papers focusing on Hanson's music, may provide individual contents in an other way as well: it may reflect how a European, a Hungarian musician might view Howard Hanson's life's work and music. In the closing chapter of my work, for example – of course with a cautious respect towards the world of both personalities – I'm trying to draw a parallel between Howard Hanson and Zoltán Kodály, the legendary Hungarian music pedagogue, composer and ethnomusicologist, attempting to reveal some correspondence between their visions and personal characters.

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

So far I have not made any publications or given any concerts related to the topic of this dissertation.