

Theses for DLA doctoral dissertation

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Biography of Imre Székely (1823–1887),  
his Hungarian fantasies, and a list of his works

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## I. Background to the research

Research in to Imre Székely and his art can be said to be scarce. Like an underground stream, he repeatedly emerges only to sink again into obscurity. The most important works on him were by Dr. Kálmán Isoz, Dr. István Jakó, and János Demény, and he was also a subject of study by Ede Sebestyén, Mária Eckhardt, and Ervin Major. There is also a master's dissertation about Székely by Dorothy J. VanAndel Frisch.

The literature on Székely and my own research indicate that although Székely cannot be ranked among the greatest names of music history, his work was significant, and left indelible traces on his contemporaries and for posterity.

In the light of this it is remarkable that in spite of his importance only brief, or incomplete biographies of him have been written, there has been no comprehensive study of his most important genre, the Hungarian fantasies, and most especially: no list of his works.

## II. Sources

The most important source for compiling the biography were the writings of Dr. István Jakó, the great-grand-nephew of Imre Székely, and I have supplemented these primarily with contemporary newspaper articles, annuals, and encyclopaediae. In addition I have drawn extensively on the archives of the Hungarian Music History Department of the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which I have supplemented in order to facilitate any future research into Székely.

In examining the fantasies, to supplement my own work I have used existing analyses such as those by Mária Eckhardt and Dorothy J. VanAndel Frisch. The dissertation includes ideas from theoretical, critical and analytical writings of contemporary composers, such as István Bartalus, Kornél Ábrányi, and Mihály Mosonyi.

In compiling the list of works I have drawn primarily on material in the National Széchényi Library.

In addition to this library having the most complete collection of Imre Székely's published works, it is the only location where I have also found manuscripts. To supplement this, I have examined the Székely collections of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Béla Bartók Conservatory (successor of the National Conservatoire) and the Kodály Archive. Of great assistance was Dorottya Esztergályi, descendant of the Székely family, the granddaughter of Dr. István Jakó, who lives in Germany and granted me access to publications unavailable in Hungary. Finally I was able to verify many data and in several cases compensate for inadequacies using Ilona Mona's book *Magyar zeneműkiadók és tevékenységük 1774-1867*, and the online catalogues of Hofmeister XIX, the British Library, the KIT-Bibliothek and the Bibliothèque National de France. These latter additions would have been extremely difficult, if at all possible, even a decade ago.

### III. Method

In compiling the biography I have endeavoured to include every available piece of biographical data relevant to music history.

I have attempted to present and classify the fantasies according to the most salient criteria. At times I have given special attention to the analysis of a particular fantasy, a detail thereof, to demonstrate a phenomenon, or certain tendencies. In addition I have endeavoured to draw attention to key points in the oeuvre, and with this in mind I have attempted to describe the importance of the composer and his influence on his contemporaries and posterity, and have sought to explain the discrepancy between the quality of the oeuvre and its obscurity.

In drawing up the list of works, taking my lead from the *Grove Dictionary of Music* I collated the data of the various editions, and compared them with the extant manuscripts or fragments thereof. As far as possible I placed the works found so far (466 to date) in

chronological order and classified them by genre, endeavouring also to show the thematic kinship between them.

This musicological dissertation thus examines hitherto unresearched details of nineteenth-century (primarily Hungarian) musical life.

#### IV. Findings

An increasing acquaintance with the works of Imre Székely persuaded me that the quantity and quality of the works are at odds with the obscurity of the composer. This increasingly powerful conviction was reinforced by my reading the sketchy literature, which indicated that research into the oeuvre of Imre Székely was important for the mapping of nineteenth-century Hungarian and also west European musical life, since its influences can be traced to the present day, particularly in Hungary.

By compiling Imre Székely's biography, hitherto available only in private hands or in an abridged form,

and supplementing it with hitherto undocumented sources, presenting his Hungarian fantasies, and by drawing up a list of works, I have contributed to research into an oeuvre which has been unjustifiably neglected, partly fulfilling János Demény's prophetic words:

Further investigation into Imre Székely's legacy was then<sup>1</sup> overwhelmed by a vortex of musical turbulence and world cataclysms, for later researchers in a distant era to pore over the full historical significance of his oeuvre.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century.

<sup>2</sup> János Demény: "Székely Imre életműve a lemezszám-kutatás tükrében". (The oeuvre of Imre Székely as seen through plate-number research.) In: Ferenc Bónis (ed.) : *Magyar Zenetörténet Tanulmányok Szabolcsi Bence 70. Születésnapjára* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1969): 201–214. 214.

V. Documentation of activity related to the  
subject of the dissertation

Concerts at which I have played Imre Székely's  
*Hungarian Fantasy no. 1* (K1):

6 February 2011, 11.00 pm, Old Music Academy,  
Budapest. Doctoral Concerts.

17 November 2011, 7.00 pm, Doctoral Hall,  
Academy of Music, Budapest. Doctoral lectures. Lecture  
and presentation on the Life and Works of Imre Székely.

20 October 2012, 6.00 pm, Manuel M. Ponce Hall,  
Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City. Solo recital.

16 April 2013, 6.00 pm, Kodály Hall, Zoltán  
Kodály Music School, Debrecen. Charity concert.

15 September 2013, 3.00 pm, Sudler Hall, Yale  
University, New Haven. International Piano Celebration.

31 March 2014, 6.00 pm, Europa Hall, BW  
Pannonia Hotel, Sopron. Solo and four-hand recital, with  
Tamás Kéry.