

Abstract of the DLA Dissertation

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Quam pulchra es et quam decora...
The Song of songs in the history of music

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Thesis

I. Preliminaries

I have been interested in the musical aspects of the *Song of Songs* in the past two decades. After an encounter with Palestrina's series of motets, first I studied the musical works only at the level of curiosity, then gradually I became deeply involved in the topic. I soon discovered the large number of works inspired by the *Song of Songs* in international music life, both on the market for records and in the oeuvre of contemporary composers all over the world, while in Hungary it has not become so popular. As a performer, I have attempted to include some relating works into the repertory of the choirs I have worked with since then.

The text of the *Song of Songs* have generated debates since the beginning, commentators of the Biblical text have been interested in its possible interpretations for two millennia. The treasury of commentaries has grown infinitely rich. It was Origen who opened the sequence of allegorical interpretations, later St. Ambrose, St. Gregory the Great, and Clairvaux Bernard reinterpreted the verses of the *Songs*. Nearly all the outstanding philosophers commented on this beautiful collection of love poetry. These commentaries can be found in numerous publications, either on their own, or in exegetical source books, and most of them are available in Hungarian, too.

However, I came across with hardly any studies that discuss the place these works take in the history of music. The first expressly musical approach of the Biblical book which concerned with its musical connections was written by Eszter Lázár and Antal Jancsovics. They created a nine-part serial for the Hungarian Radio in 1984, as editor and musical advisor, titled "*Song of Songs* in the History of Music: Poetry of Heavenly and Earthly Love in the Bible and the

History of European Music.” Several well-known scientists, historians of Church and literature, and musical performers contributed to these programmes.

I also have the knowledge of a doctoral thesis written in this topic in 2004, by Anna Eliza Mechler, titled “Canticorum Canticum in Liturgy and in Music”. I have not come across any other research in the musical field in Hungary. There are only few sources in the international literature, and even those cover only a minor segment or age of the topic discussed, such as Shay Bursty’s study about the Virgin Mary-antiphonies of the 15th century which relate to the *Song of Songs*, and also a couple of essays that analyse the works with a semiotic approach.

II. Sources

Information concerning the topic of my thesis was available chiefly on the Internet. Although sources are continuously being published on the Web, the websites and their content had to be strictly classified according to their scholarly reliability, since I encountered with false or incomplete data in many cases. I divided them into two groups: those which are reliable, and those which need revision. The most important, and, at the same time, most credited primary sources, which are regularly revised, are the following:

- www.oxfordmusiconline.com -Grove Music Online
- <http://www.corpusmusicae.com/> -Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae (CMM)
- <http://www.rism.info/> -Répertoire International des Sources Musicale (RISM)
- <http://www.cmme.org/> -Computerized Mensural Music Editing (CMME)
- <http://library2.binghamton.edu/cgi-bin/lincoln/latin-motet.cgi>
 - The Latin Motet: Indexes to Printed Collections, 1500-1600
- <http://cantusdatabase.org/> -CANTUS: A Database for Latin Ecclesiastical Chant
- <https://areditions.com/> -Recent Researches in Music
- http://www.dnb.de/DE/Home/home_node.html
 - Deutsche National Bibliothek
- <http://bsb-mdz12-spiegel.bsb.lrz.de/~mdz/index.html?c=startseite&l=de>
 - Münchener Digitalisierungszentrum
- <http://saulbgroen.nl/> -Muziekhandel Saul B. Groen
- <http://www.musicanet.org/> -The Virtual Choral Library
- <http://imslp.org/> -Petrucci Music Library
- <http://cpdl.org/> -Choral Public Domain Library

... including several other music publishers and libraries.

III. Method of Analysis

During my research, I had to check the already compiled databases, often correct them, then complete them with the details from the primary sources at hand. Since the literature concerning this topic is unevenly distributed, it proved to be an extremely difficult task to collect and order the basic data of the adaptations of the Song of Songs.

IV. Results

The *Bible* is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for European music. There is hardly any composer, independent from age, style, world view, or nationality, who avoided Biblical texts during their oeuvre. From the *Old Testament*, it must be the *Song of Songs* which inspired most musical works. The motivation of the composers can be found elsewhere in different ages. During my research, after having collected, then having revised and studied the huge quantity of material for several times, it became obvious that, when choosing a text, most composers were influenced by the relevant theological interpretation and approach of their age. The frequency a certain verse or section has been adapted into music has always been related to the popularity of the relevant allegorical interpretations and tropes. The numeric result I have arrived to, I think, surpasses all the results that previous studies in this topic came to.

V. Notes on the author's professional connection to the subject matter of the dissertation

In the chart below I enlist the concerts in which a part of the Song of Songs was performed:

Composer	Title	Year	Concert	Performing Choir / Capacity of my Participation
M. Duruflé	Tota pulchra es	2001	Szt. Anna Székesegyház (St. Anne Cathedral), Debrecen, International Youth Choir Competition, Neerpelt (B)	Girls' Choir of Ady E. High School / conductor
H. Isaac	Tota pulchra es	2002	Kodály Zoltán Primary School, Nyíregyháza	Banchieri Singers / singer
Csemiczky M.	Vox dilecti mei	2003-	On several musical events in Hungary and abroad	Kodály Choir of Debrecen / singer
J. Ch. Bach	Wachet auf ruft uns die Stimme –motetta	2003	Szt. Anna Székesegyház (St. Anne Cathedral), Debrecen	Canto Armonico / singer
P. Casals	Nigra sum	2004	Cultural Centre, Debrecen	Girls' Choir of Ady E. High School / conductor
J. S. Bach	Wachet auf ruft uns die Stimme BWV 140	2006	Nagyerdő Calvinist Church, Debrecen, Füredi Street Calvinist Church, Debrecen	Vox Antiqua Chamber Choir / conductor
D. Buxtehude	Membra Jesu nostri	2006	Szt. Anna Székesegyház (St. Anne Cathedral), Debrecen	Canto Armonico / conductor
J.-Y. Daniel-Lesur	Cantiques de cantique	2009	Szt. Anna Székesegyház (St. Anne Cathedral), Debrecen	Kodály Choir of Debrecen / singer
G. P. da Palestrina	Nigra sum, Quam pulchra es Quam pulchri sunt gressus tui	2012	Szt. Anna Székesegyház (St. Anne Cathedral), Debrecen	Canto Armonico / conductor
R. de Lassus	Quam pulchra es	2012	Szt. Anna Székesegyház(St. Anne Cathedral) , Debrecen	Canto Armonico / conductor
T. L. de Victoria	Quam pulchri sunt gressus tui	2012	Szt. Anna Székesegyház (St. Anne Cathedral), Debrecen	Canto Armonico / conductor

