

Thesis of DLA Doctoral Dissertation

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Piano Etudes by Ernst von Dohnányi
Methods and Models

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I. Antecedents of the research

The exploration of Ernst von Dohnányi's piano work, work as a pianist and his music pedagogical activities as well as the comprehensive assessment of his oeuvre has only been unravelled from the 2000s. Until the turn of the millennium only one piece of work published in 1971, namely the Dohnányi monography by Bálint Vázsonyi who lived in the USA had been at the disposal of those interested. From 2001 onwards, at last, new papers on the life and work of Dohnányi have been written: this year in our country they were the short monograph by Deborah Kiszely-Papp published in the series called Hungarian Composers as well as the summary like reference book written by James A. Grymes on the state of research of the time. Studies covering numerous guidelines have been published by the series called *Dohnányi Yearbooks (2002-2007)*, in which interviews, biographical particulars, collections of press reception, work analyses and several other scientific studies can be read. The series of Yearbooks is the achievement of Dohnányi Archives founded in 2002: ever since the composer's inheritance has been cultivated with recent researches, publications and exhibitions carried out at the sites of research maintained by the 20-21st Century Hungarian Music Archives at the Institute of Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Over the past few decades doctoral theses of high standard have been accomplished on Dohnányi's lifework. Here I mention the PhD dissertations of Ilona Kovács and Veronika Kusz (first about the chamber music sketches, the latter about Dohnányi's years in America), furthermore Dávid Pintér's DLA thesis on chamber music. Until now, researchers

have been focusing less on Dohnányi's piano playing and performing productions – obviously because there are relatively few recordings left.

Thanks to the above-mentioned literature, Dohnányi's biography, piano art and press reception have been explored in depth. In my opinion, so far, the composing-methodological questions of composing the Dohnányi-piano pieces, which deal with the given works from the interpretation point of the pianist Dohnányi, have not come into the foreground.

II. Sources, secondary literature

The topic of my DLA doctoral dissertation was Ernst von Dohnányi's piano etudes and I treated his finger exercises related to them with an analytical method. I used printed sheet music as my primary source – there are no other sources of research available for researchers.

A significant source for me was the author's preface to Dohnányi's *Essential Finger Exercises* and *Twelve Short Studies for Advanced Pianists*, in which the composer clearly describes the concept of the two volumes (finger exercises and etudes). Although Dohnányi did not write a preface to the *Daily Finger Exercises* and the *Six Concert Etudes*, the titles of the volume of these finger exercises serve also as an explanation, and in many cases the author's instructions of the concert etudes are also decisive as characters.

A significant part of the literature belonging to my dissertation consists of the studies in the series of the *Dohnányi Yearbook* and the dissertations created at Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music. A great number of music historical details about Dohnányi's disciples were very much confirmed by

Bálint Vázsonyi's Dohnányi monograph moreover by numerous articles and studies written by Ilona Kovács in the journal *Parlando. Perspectives on Ernst von Dohnányi* is a volume of studies written in English, in which several studies point out to Dohnányi's individual works, as well as his method of teaching and personality.

My two most important readings about piano Works and finger exercises were Ferenc János Szabó's publication, entitled Ferenc Liszt's Fingerprint in journal *Magyar Zene*, and Lucian B. Zidaru's dissertation entitled *Dragos Tanasescu's Treaties of Pianistic Technique*. These readings expand on finger exercises as well as the importance of hand postures belonging to piano playing. An important point of reference for the aspect of analysis was the article written by Anna Dalos published in the journal *Muzsika*, which has the title "Those Who Hidden From Schumann's Cloak", as well as János Kárpáti's "The Bumps of Bartók's Understanding" on the Internet.

III. Method

Most of the dissertation is made up with analysis it is important that I analysed the pieces primarily from the standpoint of the performer. I endeavoured to point out the make-up of music itself. As for of finger exercises my main consideration was to explore the sounding objectives of the schemas as well as the research of the relationship between these motifs and the reality. I attempted to understand the composer's intentions on how performer approach the presentation of each etude.

What I call model in my dissertation is the inherited way and system of means of creating and formulating a musical thought, a work of art, and method means the entirety of

Dohnányi own creative composing technique. In a broader sense, the method may be the interpretation itself, the performance, the interpretation of the artist.

In the dissertation I examined the etudes on the basis of four major aspects: (1) the circumstances of creation, (2) the music history context (partly based on the composer's piano repertoire), (3) the pedagogical concept, (4) the analysis of piano techniques and music.

The dissertation is divided into three parts: models, methods and analysis. The passages creating the models include a summary of the genre of etude, the formation of Dohnányi etudes ad finger exercise, as well as the composer's piano repertoire. After that, I present the activities of Dohnányi as a teacher based on the recollection of some of his students at first, then by using the composer's own statements. The third part contains technical and musical analysis based on my own considerations.

IV. Results

Before starting to write my dissertation different techniques of piano playing typical of the first half of the 20th century aroused my interest. I had seemed to recognize three distinct styles: the Chopin, the Liszt, and the Schumann-Brahms interpretation lines. In my opinion, Liszt's texture was most exploited by Bartók and Chopin's lyric was loved by Debussy and Dohnányi typically followed the Schumann-Brahms line. Focusing on Dohnányi, I began to research what models Dohnányi was working with, what clichés he kept or left.

Dohnányi compiled the series of *Essential Finger Exercises* with the aim of making the process of practice more

effective, i.e. gaining time and energy for the pianist. Mostly, rarely used finger positions strengthen the fingers muscles. Another important aspect is to ensure creative learning: by repeating a figure sequentially, the composer gives the artist the opportunity to adapt the logic of the individual examples, and then adjusts to the most comfortable feel of the play. Once you find it, you can fix it. The well-sounded figure is also a benchmark for the other series, as you can hear if it is spoiled or not easily played by one of them – that is, the artist actually teaches himself the correct example.

The third important of rarely used applications is the activation and automation of rarely used "nerve paths" for better control of finger movements. The movement of the fingers usually consists of different layers on many levels. The result of their practice is a faster reaction time, which results in a more balanced playing.

Daily Finger Exercises are intended for the artist to use them for warming up. Practicing the usual scales and races in all sorts of sounds is yet unusual with the finger numbering suggested by Dohnányi.

The *Twelve Short Studies for Advanced Pianist* were written to avoid mechanical piano play and this way to carry out a translucent, clean colourful and well-articulated piano playing. It is a light and natural piano suggestion, which, according to the composer's concept, is a guide to learning Chopin and Liszt's etudes. In this chapter, I present all the short etudes as a piano technique. I examine the method of implementation, i.e. the way how Dohnányi develops and solves the technical issues in each etude.

The main aspects of the analysis are: (1) grouping, (2) identifying the piano technique issue of the etude, (3) the musical realization and practice of technical problems, (4) identifying possible “pedagogical purpose” relief.

The *Six Concert Etudes* does not directly address the technical problem. Each concert etude has naturally been given a problem motto (chord, double catch, intermittent play, etc.). I thoroughly analyse the way and the composer technique, he realises the musical and technical development of these problem mottos. It turned out that not only the chord connections are difficult, but their insertions into the melodic line which exists in other part. As for the double catches it has been revealed that their articulations and the collision of their rhythms during the etudes is the real performer challenge. In the intermittent concert etude it is the legato playing of the continuous melody that is difficult, not the intermittent play itself, the lined octave play is actually easy, but it is difficult to articulate.

The reflection of Dohnányi's piano playing is the *Six Concert Etudes*. I have learned what the composer considers to be important from the legacy models – whether style, piano technical structure, figures – how he handles these already existing turns, how all these become personal particular "Dohnányi-school" through his hands.

V. Documentation of the activity relating to the subject matter of the dissertation

Violin sonata in C sharp minor by Ernst von Dohnányi.
Marta S. Dobos – violin, György Klebniczki – piano.
Musical Portraits. Autumn Cultural Festival of Szeged.
Ceremony Hall, University of Szeged, October 14, 2014 at 7 pm.

Three Singular Pieces op. 44 by Ernst von Dohnányi – *Burletta, Nocturne*.
„*American years of Dohnányi*” – The presentation of Dohnányi book written
by Veronika Kusz.
HAS Institute for Musicology, September 28, 2015 at 4:30 pm.

Piano Sonata in A major op. 664 by Franz Schubert, *Liebestraum* S. 541 No. 3 by Franz Liszt, Selected *Nocturnes* by Frédéric Chopin – *in F major* op. 15 No. 1, *F sharp major* op. 15 No. 2, *D flat major* op. 27 No. 2, *A flat major* op. 32 No. 2, *C minor* op. 48 No. 1, *C sharp minor* op. posth. (Brown-Index), *Clair de Lune* (Suite Bergamasque 1890) by Claude Debussy.
Regina Schindler also plays *Fantasie Impromptu* by Frédéric Chopin and *Deux Arabesques* by Claude Debussy.
Lavender Piano Melodies.
CD publication. ISRC: HU-A7G-15-0094-00105. György Klebniczki, 2016.

Six Concert Etudes by Ernst von Dohnányi op. 28. (extraits) No. 1 and No. 6.
Marta S. Dobos – violin, György Klebniczki – piano.
Hungarian recital by Marta S. Dobos and György Klebniczki. University
Spring Cultural Festival of Szeged.
Ceremony Hall, University of Szeged, May 10, 2017 at 7 pm.

Three Singular Pieces op. 44. by Ernst von Dohnányi.
Chamber music concert of Marta S. Dobos violinist, László Pólus cellist and
György Klebniczki pianist.
Ceremony Hall, University of Szeged, October 12 7 pm.

Selection of solo and chamber music pieces by Ernst von Dohnányi: *Six Concert Etudes*, *Violin sonata in C sharp minor*, *Air for Flute and Piano*, *Three Singular Pieces*, *Intermezzo from Symphony in D minor* (arrangement by Benedek Héja).
György Klebniczki – piano, Marta S. Dobos – violin, Laura Varga – flute, Ágnes Fazekas-Keszera – viola.
Melodies by Dohnányi in Szeged.
CD publication. ISRC: HU-A7G-15-00166-00177. György Klebniczki, 2017.