

Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music
Doctoral School
(6.8 Sciences of History of Arts and Culture: Musicology)

Ilona Kovács

Compositional Process in Ernst von Dohnányi's
Workshop
Studies of Sketches for Chamber Music

Abstract

Adviser: Dr. András Batta

Budapest, 2009

I. SKETCH RESEARCH: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Sketch study is one of the new genres of musicology that became widely known due to the revolutionary work of Gustav Nottebohm in the second half of the 19th century. His aim was two-fold: to establish a reliable chronology of Beethoven's works and to supplement the list of his planned but not completed compositions. His objective was to reconstruct the incomplete works, as well, but neither he nor his contemporaries searched the sketches in order to get an in-depth look on the genesis of the works themselves.

It goes without saying, that Nottebohm's achievements are pivotal but his approach to sketches was superficial and incomplete: he published parts of the entire sketch material only and interpreted those out of their context. Sketch researches published in the last fifty years together with the whole texts overlooked by Nottebohm have shed new light on the genesis of several Beethoven-compositions. It is typical that outstanding and innovative sketch studies in the Beethoven-research are called "sketch studies" instead of "création musicale" placing the emphasis onto their materials and methodology rather than their presumed goals and ideology. In a sense, research of other composers' sketches went on the same way, too. For a long time, only extracts were studied not the entire sketch material and they were used to support the authors' theory. Study of the composers' autographs completed the analyses only, instead of being the main subject of research.

Sketch researches - becoming more popular from the mid-1960s - and a paradigm change witnessed in these works have made sketch studies inextricably linked with the analysis and critical interpretation of the work and also with the research of artistic influence by other composers .

With this latter statement we have stepped on thin ice. This topic generated great interest after the conference held by the International Musicological Society at Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1970, with the title "Problèmes de la création musicale au XIX^e siècle". Eight years later, an article written by Douglas Johnson provoked a big storm and made the musicologists express their positions on this question. He has drawn a sharp line between sketch studies that serve to supplement a composer's

biographical facts and analysis of the completed work. According to him, sketch researches can only offer additional biographical data but they do not give relevant information for the analysis of the composition. Sketch researchers keep referring to and reflecting on his ideas since then. Leonard B. Meyer's and Philip Gossett's opinions have become dominant in this polemic. They call the results of sketch researches "criticism" instead of "analysis". This terminology borrowed from philosophy only recognizes direct experience as a source of learning. Followers search for the composer's intentions in the sketches.

The case studies in Chapter III in my dissertation take a side in this dispute: using analysis was essential to reveal the composition's genesis at all four examined works of Dohnányi and also to compare the sketches and the definitive form.

II. METHODOLOGY

The sketch material is extremely diverse and varied. In addition to memo-sketches, drafts, composing scores, autographs, aborted plans, discarded movements or movement parts and transcriptions it also includes all kinds of documents that contain the composer's hand mark and composing intentions. My dissertation offers a new approach to methodology and source interpretation and it incorporates the latest findings in musicology. The first and most important step was to design a clear system of terminology for Dohnányi's sketches, as only an adequate nomenclature can guarantee unambiguous references to the documents.

Different terminologies used in international sketch-literature are not always compatible with each other. They can differ even when referring to the same composer's sketches. However, they have provided me a valuable guidance for interpretation of Dohnányi's sketches. I have built on experiences accumulated in studies of other composers' sketches: English terminology used in Beethoven-studies, German references concerning Wolf-studies and Hungarian terminology from the Bartók-philology have contributed to my efforts to fill „the terminological black hole” in the Dohnányi-research. At the same time, I highlight the characteristics of Dohnányi's manuscripts, as well.

A special case of sketch studies is when the subject of the research blends into its own early versions that, at a certain phase of the compositional process — even if temporarily —, were considered as final by the composer. While sketches are never regarded as final by the composer, early versions — even if for a short time — are generally considered by him as completed. The link between all these documents is a question: *Why?* Why has the composer changed his idea? Why has he felt that the next version could be better (and have those become really better?). What kind of consideration has made him correct a few measures only in one place or leave out whole pages or movements somewhere else? The sketches can help us reveal the full “horizon” of a composition. Peeling off different layers that witness different phases of the compositional process can give us an in-depth look on the very core of the work. It was a priority for me to draw a „departure-arrival” arch in order to follow the journey of individual works through the various stages until they reach their final forms. Searching for possible answers to the „why-questions” between two stations of development, I have always made an attempt to carefully define the position of the given composition in the oeuvre. This is why the first chapter of the dissertation focuses first on Dohnány's earliest manuscripts (including autographs from his childhood and his composition exercises at the Academy of Music) and it only deals with the mature works afterwards. Thus, in addition to drawing attention to the different horizons from different ages of the composer's life and his different compositional periods, I examined the sources and effects of the compositions, as well. Thorough examination of the early compositions can lead to a better understanding of the composer's mature style: they offer a lot of factual information about compositional techniques and ideas that can be traced all the way through to the mature works of Dohnányi.

III. MAJOR FINDINGS

This dissertation examines Dohnányi's chamber music in three main chapters with the help of philology, analysis, critical interpretation and the

latest methodology of sketch research. It has a broad overview: in addition to investigating the chamber music works it also deals with the composer's pieces for orchestra and piano studying experiences drawn from those.

Chapter I (Phases of the Compositional Process) interprets documents of Dohnányi's compositional workshop. In the first part of this Chapter (Dohnányi about Composing, Compositions, Compositional Process) Dohnányi himself speaks about creation and the definition of creative work. Dohnányi was very reluctant to speak about his music and even more so about his creative process because he shared Goethe's vision: „Bilde Künstler, rede nicht“. Therefore, it is of extreme value for us if — although very rarely — he expressed his views about his compositions and the compositional process. This part is built by the mosaics of hints dropped by the composer and hidden in several hundreds of documents (e. g. newspaper articles, letters and memoirs).

The novelty offered by this dissertation is in the fact that it is based on research carried out in the two largest collections of autograph sources of Dohnányi's manuscripts in the world. One is held by the National Széchényi Library in Budapest and the other one is in the British Library in London. Several of these documents have received no scholarly attention so far and some of them have recently been discovered by the author of this dissertation. The second part of Chapter I (Overview of the Sources) lists and organises these documents according to their type. The third part of this Chapter is the largest one (Types and Characteristics of the Sources): It complements the sketch study by featuring the characteristics of sources from Dohnányi's childhood and his student years at the Academy of Music by highlighting their individualities and differences.

Investigation of the relationship between sketches and fair copies makes the sketch studies complete. This part (Fair Copies) throws new light upon the perception of „final form“ of compositions. The last part of Chapter I (Fragments and Plans) deals with compositions that the composer was not willing or able to finish. The latter cases — even being unfinished compositions — allow us to catch a glimpse of their creator's magnificent plans.

One of the major findings and achievements of this dissertation is being the first to discover Dohnányi's unmistakable and very characteristic „trademark“. This is a common feature connecting all of Dohnányi's cyclical (and in some exceptional cases not cyclical) works starting from his juvenilia: the return of the principal theme of the first movement at the very end of the

composition. It is like a unique signature and because of its consistency it can by all means be interpreted as Dohnányi's trademark.

Dohnányi's trademark frames his compositions and provides us with a sense of completeness. It reflects a close relation that links the movements and generates an inner cohesion of the composition. Chapter II is based on this narrative and it is the compendium of this phenomenon that gives examples of different appearance of the trademark. The introductory part (Definition) enlightens this phenomenon in Dohnányi's oeuvre, and it seeks parallels in other composers' pieces and in other fields of art.

The first part of this Chapter (Variations and Dohnányi's trademark) demonstrates the connection between the variations that play a very important role in Dohnányi's entire oeuvre and his trademark. The illustrations in this part are chosen not only from the pieces called variations by the composer, but also from movements in variation form.

The second part (Dohnányi's trademark in his early works) focuses on the earliest appearances of the trademark in his Overture in B flat, Piano Quartet in F sharp Minor and Zrínyi Overture. While the second and the three last parts of this chapter follow a chronological order, the third part draws our attention to a special link between compositions of the same genre. This proves a close structural connection between the Symphony in F Major and the Symphony in D Minor (op. 9), and between the latter and the Symphony in E Major (op. 40).

Parts 4 and 5 (Variations on Dohnányi's trademark — 1, 2) go back to the chronological order. Classification is based on the observation that Dohnányi applied the same formal and thematic innovation several times in a short period. Apart from the proximity in time of the examined works, they also share the fact that themes (or thematic groups) from other movements of the compositions (part 4) or themes (or thematic groups) from the first movement (part 5) recur in subsequent movements, not just the principal theme.

The last part (Dohnányi's trademark in his later works: fusion of the conventional/traditional and individual) completes the typology by featuring this phenomenon in the composer's later works. While parts 4 and 5 argue that the compositions are linked together not only by their time of creation but by containing *the trademark* as well, the later works form a close-knit group on the basis of their diverse references to their own beginnings. The

presence of the trademark shows an exceptional wide variety in the last compositional period.

The last and largest Chapter that is built on the newest results of the sketch researches examines the Sextet in B flat Major from the composer's youth, the A major Quartet (op. 7), the Sextet in C Major (op. 37) and Suite en Valse (op. 39). The methodology of sketch research uses a complete arsenal of philology. The conclusions are based on the results gained from examination of the original manuscripts. The analyses are preceded by drawing a historical background and by describing the reception of the composition. They are supported by source and paper study, as well.

IV. PUBLICATIONS OF THE AUTHOR IN THE SUBJECT OF THE DISSERTATION

'Ernst von Dohnányi, the Chamber Musician' *Zenetudományi tanulmányok Kroó György tiszteletére* [Studies in Musicology in Honor of György Kroó] Papp Márta (ed.) Budapest: Magyar Zenetudományi és Zenekritikai Társaság [Hungarian Musicological Society], 1996. 198-204.

'Ernst von Dohnányi, the Professor of the Academy of Music, Budapest', *Dohnányi Évkönyv [Dohnányi Yearbook] 2002*, Sz. Farkas Márta (ed.) Budapest: Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2003. 55-66.

'The Dohnányi-method (1.)' *Parlando* 46/4 (2004): 16-21.

'In Ernő Dohnányi's Workshop — The Compositional Process of Movement I of the String Quartet no. 1 (op. 7)' *Magyar Zene* [Hungarian Music] 43/2 (May 2005): 155-178.

'Ernő Dohnányi's Career as a Pianist, Part I: 1897-1921', *Dohnányi Évkönyv 2005*, Sz. Farkas Márta és Gombos László (ed.) Budapest: Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2006. 63-15.

'Ernő Dohnányi's Career as a Pianist, Part II: 1921-1944', *Dohnányi Évkönyv 2006/7*, Sz. Farkas Márta és Gombos László (ed.) Budapest: Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2007. 306-360.

'In Ernő Dohnányi's Workshop — Starting the Composition' *Magyar Zene* 45/2 (May 2007): 201-214.

'Sketches and their Characteristics in Ernő Dohnányi's Manuscripts' *Magyar Zene* 46/4 (November 2008): 451-470.

'A Hybrid Form: the Second Movement of Ernst von Dohnányi's String Quartet in A Major (op. 7)' *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 50/1-2, Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2009. 75-86.

'Ernő Dohnányi's Career as a Pianist, Part III: 1945-1960', *Dohnányi Évkönyv 2008/9*, Sz. Farkas Márta és Gombos László (ed.) Budapest: Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2009 (in progress)