

DLA doctoral thesis

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I. Background of the research

Vladimir Sofronitsky's name sounds familiar to many musicians, many people consider him to be the finest interpreter of Scriabin's piano works. His life and artistic career is – however – little known. I first came across the name Sofronitsky during the course of my conservatory studies, and managed to buy some of his CDs during my years at the Academy of Music, but the availability of his recordings is reduced, and the lack of international literature on his life and art increased the mystery surrounding his personality. When I decided to research the artist's oeuvre, I soon discovered the unequal distribution of resources: while in English and German language I could only find a couple of disc accompanying booklets, book chapters and dissertations, I collected about nine hundred pages of Russian memoirs and essays on Sofronitsky. To understand and translate this abundant literature I had to learn Russian. The importance of my research is further emphasized by the fact that in Europe nobody published any book or essay specifically about Sofronitsky.

II. Resources

Part of the Russian culture is to honour the memory of great artists with a volume of recollections. For my research two such books were available, *Vospominania o Sofronickom* – published already for the second time in the '80s (Moscow: Sovietyky Kompozitor, 1982), and a similar publication entitled *Vspominaya Sofronickogo* (Moscow: Izdatelsky Dom Klassika-XXI, 2008). The publication titled *Poet fortepiano* joined the list of sources, containing mainly shorter studies. In all the three publications the reminiscences of relatives and students included the most interesting and important informations on Sofronitsky. In this respect, the essential sources of inspiration were the booklet written by the artist's younger daughter, Viviana Sofronitsky for Brilliant Classics' CD edition of Sofronitsky's live recordings (Leeuwarden: Brilliant Classics 8975, 2008), and Emily White's doctoral thesis (The Manhattan School of Music, 1995) containing interesting details of interviews with the pianist's older daughter, who lives in America. I bought the majority of the Russian literature in Moscow, when I had the opportunity to perform concerts there. For the analysis of recordings I could use English and Japanese

CD editions imported by the Doctoral School of the Franz Liszt Academy of Music Budapest, these recordings can be found now in the studio of the university's library.

III. The research method

The foremost aim of my dissertation is to provide an objective and more complete picture of Sofronitsky - the man, the artist and the pedagogue. As I mentioned earlier, to understand and process the large amount of Russian literature I had to start learning Russian, because I already belong to a generation that has not studied Russian language at school. This prolonged the research period significantly. During the processing of sources I had to select those essays which contain important information and separate from the ones recalling only personal memoirs and subjective recollections. After presenting the biographical details I devoted separate chapters to Sofronitsky's art, personality, pedagogical activity and sound recordings in order to present as complete picture of the artist as possible. Due to the inaccuracy of the available Russian sources it proved to

be a complex task to present precise, objective details. The documents related with Sofronitsky's biography, repertoire and surviving recordings contain in a number of cases discrepant informations, this led me to sum up all the details and clear the possible mistakes. A good example of this phenomenon is the artist's autobiography, in which Sofronitsky – unlike other sources - denotes a year latter date of birth.

An important part of my research is the analysis of Sofronitsky's Scriabin-interpretation, through which we can understand why many people consider the pianist as the most authentic performer of the composer's piano works. In my analysis, I compared the pianist's four different recordings of Alexander Scriabin's F-sharp major poem with the composer's own interpretations recorded on player-pianos. With the help of the Sonic Visualizer software I made tempo graphs for Sofronitsky's recordings and compared them with the graph of Scriabin's Welte-Mignon recording, which was prepared and published by Pavel Lobanov in 1960 in Moscow.

IV. Results

I have undertaken the task to draw the most complete picture of Sofronitsky's art and personality, because the topic has not yet been discussed in Hungarian. I hope that my thesis will fill a gap and counts as novelty, as it is the first Hungarian study on Sofronitsky prepared with the aim of correcting previous inaccuracies. In my work, I revised the artist's biographical data, repertoire and recordings preserved with the aim of completeness, based on all available sources, concert programmes, letters, studies and recollections – this can be conceived as scientific result.

An undoubted result of my research is the analysis of Sofronitsky's Scriabin-interpretation, carried out through the comparison of the composer's F-sharp major poem (Op.32 No.1): several recordings of this piece were preserved with the pianist and even two with the composer. By comparing the artist's recordings made at different times I could verify the spontaneous, improvisational style of his playing, capture his artistic creativity, and I also discovered many similarities between Sofronitsky's and Scriabin's interpretation. Although the pianist never met the composer, my

research proved that Sofronitsky certainly knew the player-piano recordings of Scriabin and was an authentic interpreter of the composer's piano works.

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

It is impossible to pursue any performing activity related to the subject of my dissertation, since it would be pointless to imitate the performing style of Vladimir Sofronitsky - or any other great artist. However, the large number of his recordings I had the opportunity to listen to will certainly inspire my play in the doctoral concert. My research – at the same time – is an excellent opportunity to study the works of Scriabin, I will also programme some piano works of the composer for my doctoral concert – including the subject of my comparative analysis, the F-sharp major poem Op.32 No.1. In 2008, at a presentation of period instruments I met the artist's younger daughter, Viviana Sofronitsky, with whom I am still in touch: she sent me several times valuable documents for my research. We also plan to publish an English book on her father, as the majority of the sources are solely available in Russian. This plan

clearly shows that my research is not yet finished, I cannot end it but stop it. During my research, I had the opportunity to listen to many recordings of Sofronitsky, but even at the time of completion of my dissertation some new, previously unreleased recordings were published on CD: this means that the restoration of amateur recordings made in the Scriabin Museum has not yet been completed. Sviatoslav Richter and Emil Gilels both praised Sofronitsky as the greatest pianist of his age, with the publication of my dissertation I hope that more and more Hungarian people will discover Vladimir Sofronitsky's special art.