

DLA Doctoral Dissertation Theses

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Tradition and Renewal
in the String Quartets of Sándor Veress

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I. Research Preliminaries

I first became acquainted with the works of Sándor Veress in 1997, when I was a member of the Budapest Festival Orchestra. It was during this time, that, together with András Schiff, Dénes Várjon and Heinz Hollinger, we recorded the *Concerto for piano and orchestra* and the *Hommage a' Paul Klee*. Ten years later, in 2007, a Veress Festival was held at the Palace of Arts where I took part as the cellist of the Keller String Quartet playing the Second string quartet. I was also able to become better acquainted with many of his other compositions, including the *József Attila Songs for voice and piano*, the *Trio for violin, viola and violoncello* and the *Sonata for violoncello solo*. This inspired me to further my knowledge of Veress' chamber music, and in particular, of his two string quartets.

Before beginning my analysis of the string quartets, I researched both Hungarian and foreign literature that is closely linked to this topic. I found three essays exploring these pieces in detail and I have relied on these later on, in my work. However, none of the studies could give me a full, analytical picture of the pieces. Andreas Traub's writings (in German), explore the early works of Veress in great-detail, with just a short concise chapter dealing with the First string quartet. His analysis is based, on the twelve-tone structure and he has primarily highlighted the harmonic and melodic aspects of the music. This, in particular was of great help to me in analysing the melodic structure of the first string quartet.

I came across the relevant Hungarian literature passages in the studies of Ede Terényi. He uses similar terminology to that of Kárpáti and Lendvai in his analysis. The examples he provides about the tonal system used, within the context of overall form, have given new light to ways of analyzing Veress' works.

The third piece of writing, in English, comes from John Weissmann, who analysed the formal and tonal elements of both string quartets. This became the basis of my analysis.

Comparing the three studies, I concluded, that none of the authors have given a sufficiently comprehensive overview of the string quartets. Traub has not written about the Second string quartet. Although Terényi has analysed several pieces, he mostly focuses on the smaller details, highlighting the individuality of the compositional solutions. The most comprehensive analyses, has been given by Weissmann. However, it is lacking in detail and has not taken into account any of the Hungarian research.

In this thesis, I have attempted to give a more detailed analysis of these two pieces of Veress' oeuvre, using the previously mentioned works as well as my own ideas.

II. Sources

In addition to the studies mentioned above I have considered the Veress- and Bartók quartet scores as my primary sources of inspiration which were published by the Editio Suvini Zerboni (Veress), the Editio Musica and the Boosey & Hawkes (Bartók) labels.

Although not linked directly to the works of Veress, I would also like to appraise the *Bartók-Analitika* and the analysis of *Bartók's string quartets* by János Kárpáti for their clear and enjoyable content. It was also necessary to use *Harvard lectures* by Béla Bartók, *Bartók és Kodály harmóniavilága* by Ernő Lendvai as well as *Harminc írás* by Lajos Bárdos for the analysis of the tone-set of polytonal melody.

Contemporary reviews about the premieres of the string quartets in *Pesti Napló* and *Népszava* by Aladár Tóth and Sándor Jemnitz, the biography of Sándor Végh by Dániel Löwenberg as well as the memoirs of Sándor Veress (edited by Ferenc Bónis in *Így láttuk Bartókot* and *Üzenetek a XX. századból*) also helped me write Chapters II-IV of my thesis.

III. Method

In my thesis I have aimed to illustrate the points where Veress evokes the great predecessors-Bartók and Beethoven, using his own methods. These points are supported by examples from the scores. When examining the structure of his works I have attempted to highlight the importance and significance of his use of counterpoint. Taking into consideration the largest forms, down to the smallest elements, I found it important to show the tonal variations of melodies and the development of the motifs, simultaneously with the evolution of the piece. I have highlighted the heritage of Bartók by examining in great-detail the use of notes in melodic themes. I have discussed how polymodal chromaticism has taken a direction towards twelve-tone structure.

During the analysis of the string quartets – which provide the backbone of my thesis – I wanted to give a detailed exploration of the most characteristic features of the composer, as well as his relationship to the string quartets by Bartók. Having used 148 examples from scores – which at first glance might seem like much – I have hoped to clarify this analysis.

IV. Results

With this dissertation, I have primarily repaid an old debt to myself. Being a member of the Keller String Quartet, the six string quartets of Bartók have always been part of our permanent repertoire. Although I have read and understood the relevant Hungarian literature, I have never analysed these works in detail. Studying the string quartets of Veress has given me the opportunity to find out more about Bartók's compositions. As a result, in my everyday work I not only understand, but also hear and feel the knowledge acquired, which in a way has surpassed the routine of performing and has inspired variations in my interpretations.

Compared to previous studies published on this topic, I feel I have analysed the works in more detail. When discussing melodic material, I have highlighted the polymodal chromaticism leading to dodecaphony with examples. I have provided examples to illustrate a relationship to Bartók's string quartets. I have organised the transformation of motifs in table format.

I feel that it is important to state the following: although Veress started to use dodecaphony in these early works, the twelve-tone structure has merely remained as a means of expressing his versatile personality as a composer.

His folk-music roots made his works stand out from other dodecaphonic works of Western European composers.

During my analysis, I became familiar with two wonderful pieces of music and I hope I will have the opportunity to benefit from this knowledge on stage. I sincerely hope that in my thesis I have demonstrated the traditional but at the same time pioneering personality of Sándor Veress and his sublime music.

V. Documentation

**Sándor Veress composer's evenings III.
2007. 11. 27. Palace of Arts**

Programme:

Sándor Veress: Sonata for violoncello solo
Featured: Rafael Rosenfeld

Sándor Veress: Sonata for piano solo
Featured: Dénes Várjon

Sándor Veress: String Quartet No. 2.
Featured: Keller String Quartet