

PhD Dissertation – Theses

Doctoral School (7.6 Musical Art)

Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music

**HUNGARIAN DOUBLE BASS LITERATURE OF THE 20TH AND 21ST
CENTURY
FROM ZOLTÁN KODÁLY TO PRESENT**

DOCTORAL THESIS

BY

Ivan Sztankov

**Budapest
2012**

1. Prelude to Research

Actually, I found just a few credible written documents on the topic. I could say that Hungarian double bass playing represents an undiscovered segment of field of musicology. There are two available works in this context. The one is the publication of Tibor Bordás, entitled „*Data on the History of Double Bass*” which is a brochure on the history of instruments rather than a scientific summary of Hungarian double bass literature. It was published in 1981 by the Kodály Zoltán Music College in Debrecen, in 100 stencilled copies only.

The other book is actually the amplified edition of the first: Tibor Bordás – „*Double Basses and Double Bass Players*”. István Einreiter has played pivotal role in the compilation of this book, namely, he continued and elaborated on the work of Tibor Bordás, especially concerning the chapters dealing with Hungarian double bass players and pieces. This book was published by Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó in 1995.

During the 17 years since 1995, several new double bass pieces emerged. However, many compositions dating before 1995 are missing even from the book mentioned above. Just to mention some: the piece of Dubrovay arranged by me (1991) or the pieces of Pál Rózsa from 1992. Well, the book of Bordás is not targeted at the description of Hungarian double bass playing, instead, it wants to give a comprehensive picture about the international aspects of this instrument. That is why I thought the issue of a national research in this respect is more than actual, with focus on double bass in particular.

2. Sources

In addition to the above sources, I would like to mention as example an essay published in 1934 in the periodical *Studies from the Past of Budapest* – referred to in the introductory chapter of my dissertation on musicology –, extensively dealing with the principles of operation approved by the general assembly of the Music Association of Pest-Buda in 1836. Another source I would like to mention is a document on the problems of the double bass part of the orchestra of the Technical University from the school year of 1904/1905, that can be found on page 300 of the book „*History of the Technical University*”. Another source is the

work of Béla Csuka, with the title „*The Past and Present of Contrabass in Hungary*”, giving an amusing account of double bass and its players active in the 40s. This essay was published in the book „*The Glory Days and Present of Hungarian Music in Historical Pictures*” (1944). As I have already mentioned, the topic of Hungarian double bass literature has not been systematically studied, therefore, I could gather information via personal contacts, conversations and correspondence. I had to interview contemporaries and family members to learn more especially about Montag and Tibay, to be able to put together the pieces of the puzzle, often based on contradictory data. Although the majority of double bass pieces are available only in manuscript, I succeeded finding curiosities like the music sheet „*Montag: 3 Etudes*” published by Rózsavölgyi in 1937, giving an opportunity to draw conclusions concerning the quality of Montag’s work and the technical level of the age. In addition to that, I worked on the basis of published materials as well, like the series „*Works of Hungarian Artists for Contrabass and Piano*” or the „*Double Bass School*” of Montag. All of them proved to be a valuable source of information. As far as Kurtág and Ligeti are concerned, I had to rely on scores and audio materials to compile the relevant chapters.

3. Method

The preparatory seminar held by Anna Dalos had a great impact on me when choosing the method for writing my dissertation. I started work as suggested by her. It proved to an interesting and useful challenge, given the fact that I had to explore a brand new field. I decided to give a detailed description only about compositions that played a determinant role from the approximately 150 pieces in total. The rest are listed in an encyclopaedical order in a separate chapter. I was very curious about the composing secrets of László Dubrovay, so I tried to explore the circumstances of the origin of the „Solo” cycle – in particular, his Solo No. 10 for double bass – when making an interview with him. When analysing this piece from the aspect of performing, I had my colleagues playing the double bass in mind: I hoped to attract their attention so that they take fancy to play this very modern piece when reading my account of the hidden secrets of art. I am convinced that my dissertation is rich in information so it can have a well-deserved place in the field of musicological activities dealing with double bass, both nationally and internationally.

4. Outcome

The motivation behind the choice of this topic was to explore all aspects of the actual state of Hungarian solo playing of the double bass. I wanted to answer the question how important this instrument would be for Hungarian composers and what they think about the opportunities provided by the double bass. It is generally accepted that contrabass has no literature. But what is the reason for that? Isn't it maybe because the technical development of this instrument started much later than that of the others? Devoted talents of Hungarian double bass playing like Montag and Tibay triggered tremendous development of this instrument by their pioneer work. Due to the activities of them and their foreign colleagues works like Cello Concerto of Saint-Saëns, Roco Variation of Tchaikovsky or Caprice No. 24 of Paganini are played on the double bass nowadays. This technical level was inconceivable 50 years before. As a result of my research, now I understand that also the Hungarian composers are interested in this instrument and many of them see new opportunities and unexplored accords in the double bass. My research fills a niche in musicology as my dissertation is the first work to give a full account of original double bass pieces in Hungary. Not to speak of the pieces before 1995, this is the first time works of Zoltán Tibay are compiled. I think it is an important outcome that now, we can have a clearer picture about the quality of Hungarian double bass literature and playing as a result of my research.

5. Documentation of Activities Related to the Topic of the Dissertation

I played the composition Solo No. 10 of Dubrovay mentioned in Chapter 6 several times both in Hungary and abroad. This piece was staged for the first time in 1992 during the Mini Festival in Pesti Vígadó. Hungarian Television broadcasted it several times.

It was also broadcasted in the series Kis Esti Zene of M1 TV, in 1993.

As well as during the Dubrovay László night in the Nádor room of the Institute of Blind People in 1995.

The piece Dubrovay: Solo No. 10 was published in the compilation of The Virtuoso Double Bass, published by Hungaroton Classic Ltd, HCD 31518.

I also played it during the chamber music events in the concert hall of Kuala Lumpur in 2002.

I played the chamber piece of György Kurtág: Op. 27/1 Quasi una fantasia during the Bartók seminar in Szombathely, with the participation of Zoltán Kocsis, Miklós Perényi, Amadinda orchestra etc., conducted by Péter Eötvös.

I played the double bass part of György Kurtág: Op.14/d Bagatelles also during the chamber music events in the concert hall of Kuala Lumpur in 2003. Participants: Hristo Dobrinov (flute), Akiko Nakamura (piano).