

Thesis of DLA dissertation

Rita Termes

József Sári's Piano Pieces and
Piano Chamber Music

Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music
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I. Background of the research

József Sári was my music theory teacher during my studies at the Academy of Music Budapest. His views and pedagogical work made a huge impact on me. I learned and played his piece *Contemplazione* composed for flute and piano as a staff pianist. I followed the preparation process for the performance of the *To Echo* as the staff pianist of the flute department of the Béla Bartók Conservatory. Zoltán Gyöngyössi as head of the department, drew my attention to living composers with his devotion to contemporary music. There are many reviews of the József Sári pieces, in addition to his work as composer, he also wrote reviews of concerts and recorded music. Some short studies and presentations also make brief references to possible connections in his works, and his approach as a composer. However, comprehensive analysis that considers his whole oeuvre has never been made. As a pianist and staff pianist I concentrated on analysing the features of the Sári style in his piano and piano chamber pieces.

II. Sources

During my work the most important sources were the scores of these pieces. Some of them have been published, some are manuscripts. In my research I relied on the following: booklet by Zoltán Farkas presenting the composer and his works, the collection of his interviews, the criticism and reviews published in the journals „Muzsika” and „Parlando”, as well as conversations and portraits with the composer made by Máté Hollós in the Hungarian Radio. Direct discussions with the composer were particularly influential on my work, these shed light on some elements of the background of compositions and revealed certain connections between the pieces. Talking to the performers of the Sári pieces helped me interpreting the music from the performers’ point of view. Edit Hambalkó, Mariann Ábrahám, Judit Kékesi, Erika Becht, Gábor Eckhardt and Mária Apagyi provided me with valuable background materials, letters and reviews, in addition to sharing their experiences and thoughts in connection with the pieces.

III. Method

József Sári composed numerous piano pieces. Many of them are cycles or series that concentrate on a specific topic. When his pedagogical work became even more important, he was asked to compose many pieces for students. In these works the Sári style is just as vivid as in the major works that require exquisite technical skills. I classified his pieces, looked for parallels and references by following his style and trying to reveal the relationships hidden in the background. In the later period of his oeuvre, human voice was also added. His songs date from his mature era, and this change is very visible. In my work I classified József Sári's piano pieces based on different aspects. The composer makes references to his predecessors (Bach, Schumann and Bartók) openly and unambiguously. Based on this classification, the chapters are the following:

1. Bartók and Sári – Composing his pedagogical pieces, Bartók's influence is clearly visible.
2. Finding his voice – pieces born after early works where the Sári's style first becomes distinct.

3. Bach and Sári – Bach's presence can be found in the main body of Sari's work.
4. Sári and the game (Sári and Sály) – The game, the intellectual music game is expanded.
5. Schumann and Sári – Schumann's poetic voice appears through titles and atmosphere.
6. Piano pieces from the 2000s
7. Songs

IV. Results

I used the above methodology to complete the analysis of all piano and piano chamber pieces in Sári's oeuvre. As a result, some regularly recurring motifs, stylistic features characterising his work can be identified. The composer said the following about his oeuvre:

“If someone analyses an oeuvre, different aspects will always appear significant. However, if it is considered as a whole, it will turn out that it has always followed one or just a few themes all along, one single attitude, a relationship with music, which has been constantly and distinctly present [...]. This defines any piece to such an extent, that if you hear a piece from thirty years ago and then one from today, you will immediately detect the connection.”