

LISZT FERENC ACADEMY OF MUSIC

Doctoral School (7.6 Art of Music)

**LAURA ANTAL**

**FORMS AND WAYS OF EXPRESSION  
IN GYÖRGY LIGETI'S VOCAL WORKS**

THESIS OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Budapest, 2008

There are only two books written in Hungarian, which deal with György Ligeti's work as a composer. One of them was written by Péter Várnai in 1979 and the other one is Eckhard Roelcke's interview-book from 2005, but there is no complete study that we know of, which would fully cover the composer's whole life. There are numerous German essays that deal with Ligeti's works, one for example analyses his latest choruses.<sup>1</sup> While writing this dissertation, two other arguments came to light, one discusses Ligeti's early composing period, while the other writes about his piano works.<sup>2</sup> In my dissertation I present a synopsis of György Ligeti's vocal works, starting with his first experimental compositions, discussing not only his choral movements, but his vocal-instrumental works, his oratorical and theatrical pieces as well. I analyse the forms and structural build of his works together with his ideas and with the subject, that needs to be interpreted. I also point out some of his musical solutions' similarity both in his plainly instrumental works and also his vocal works that have interweaved his life. At last I draw the conclusion, that the old structures and stylistical marks of interpretation always reappear throughout his life, going hand in hand with the new structures and interpretational styles..

---

<sup>1</sup> Englbrecht, *Die späte Chormusik von György Ligeti*

<sup>2</sup> Márton Kerékfy, "A 'new music' from nothing": *György Ligeti's Compositional Development, 1950-1956*, 2007; Mariann Marczy, *György Ligeti's Piano Etudes*, 2008

## *New Ways*

In the last choir works of Ligeti, which he has composed in Hungary, one can easily observe the musical structures, that have evolved in the last couple of decades and have so determined his career. The first chapter discusses how these two movement-statuses are expressed vocally.

### *The Birth of a New Poliphony*

The *Requiem*'s analysis details the inner, poliphonic enrichment of the statically moving musical material. In *Lux aeterna* the consonant, accordical points give the piece a formal phrasing. The *Clocks and Clouds* mixes the two different kinds of movements, the statico and the meccanico structures, it shows them like they are inherent to each other.

### *Gestures and the Grotesque*

The intensively gesturing and discursively heated phrasing has already appeared in one of the movements of the *Requiem*. The pieces of *Adventures* are all 'gesture-music' fully made up of effects, whose grotesque style appears on the scene through the dramatical interpretation of the composer's opera.

## *Late Works*

In the 80's new musical and other influences have affected the composer, which also show in the structuring of his vocal works. Each of the typical forms provide an outer frame for the representation of these works. The micropolyphony and the *meccanico* return and some old forms come back to life again.

## *Viewpoints of the Conductor*

I first got engaged with Ligeti's *Nonsense Madrigals* in 2003 and the workflow aroused numerous questions and made me think not just about the technical realization of the songs, but about the role of the conductor. Besides a few early works, Ligeti's madrigal-series were performed under my conducting,<sup>3</sup> so that is why the analysis particularly follows this opus.

---

<sup>3</sup> 30. 05. 2003. Art Hall, *The Sounds of Nature* – two movements from the *Nonsense Madrigals*;  
20. 10. 2003. Autumn Festival, Rudas Bath, *Nonsense Madrigals*

## *Summary*

The last chapter is to list Ligeti's vocal stylistical characteristics. These characteristics, formal, structural and emotional features are not exclusive to Ligeti's vocal art only; the problem of how to realize particular ideas interweave both his vocal and instrumental works in a given creative period. A typically unique vocal mark in Ligeti's art is the decision-making over the lyrics, its handling, its shaping into a particular form and its approach to a given genre or structural method.

***List of the author's concerts - concerts of the „Free Voices” Vocal Ensemble:***

20. 10. 2003.: Autumn Festival, Rudas Bath

*Judit Varga: Mad(á)rigál*

*Bálint Bolcsó: L'Oiseau blessé d'une flèche*

*Dávid Opánszki: Átfedések (Overlaps)*

*György Ligeti: Nonsense Madrigals*

08. 02. 2004.: Making New Waves Festival

Trafó House of Contemporary Arts

*Dilara Basak Özdemir: Y los sueños, sueños son...*

*Judit Varga: Mad(á)rigál*

*Balázs Horváth: Madrigali/ I.*

24. 05. 2004.: *Madrigali of Hindemith and Gesualdo*

Old Academy of Music, Great Hall

*Carlo Gesualdo: Felice primavera*

*Paul Hindemith: Frühling; An eine Schmetterling*

*Carlo Gesualdo: Ardita Zanzaretta*

*Paul Hindemith: An eine Tote; Judaskuß*

*Carlo Gesualdo: Mercè grido piangendo*

*Paul Hindemith: Trink aus!; Magisches Rezept*

17. 02. 2005.: *Colorful Nations*, Russian Cultural Center

*Igor Stravinsky: Cantata*

*Béla Bartók: Štyri slovenské národné piesne*

*Elena Camoletto: Geistlich*

*György Ligeti: Night; Morning*

*Henk Badings: La Danse des Dieux*

*Mátyás Seiber: Three Nonsense Songs*

14. 06. 2005.: *Female Choir and Other Instruments*

Academy of Music, Small Hall

*Igor Stravinsky: Four Russian Peasant Songs*

*András Mihály: Apocryphs/ I. II.*

*Zoltán Jeney: Bird-calling*

*György Ligeti: Two Canons*

*Béla Bartók: Village Scenes*

07. 04. 2006.: *Magic*, Budapest History Museum, King's Cellar

*Johannes Brahms: Vier Gesänge op. 17*

*Petr Eben: Zauberspruch, den Liebsten zu beschwören*

*Paul Hindemith: Magisches Rezept*

*Frank Martin: Songs of Ariel*

*Florent Schmitt: Cinq Refrains/ Maléfice*

*Jaakko Mäntyjärvi: Four Shakespeare Songs/ III.*