

DLA Thesis

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Hungarian Musician Victims of the Holocaust

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## **I. Background of the research**

In the last decades the attention on the martyrs of the Holocaust has been renewed. The narratives of the last witnesses make the world realize that this disgraceful period of history is still unprocessed which challenges researchers anew. The first publication to deal with the musical environment of the era of the Holocaust appeared in the '80s. Joža Karas's publication *Music in Terezín 1941–1945* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1985) was the first to give account of the musical life of the concentration camp in Terezín. The Jewish composers working in Terezín were directly deported to Auschwitz and were killed there by the Nazis. The rediscovered works of Viktor Ullmann, Gideon Klein, Pavel Haas and other composers have made the musical world realize: these compositions have not been heard for half a century, and the memory of these composers has sunk into oblivion. In the footsteps of this initiative more and more names and works of martyr composers have emerged in Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and France.

In Hungary, due to the peculiarities of the Hungarian Holocaust, the regime of the Arrowed Cross Party, the Second World War and the following communist dictatorship, the musical world has not yet really become aware of its losses.

Just as Theresianstadt connects the composers of Terezín, the fate of these Hungarian composers and musicians was also connected by a geographical and also intellectual center, the Budapest Academy of Music. It is a peculiar coincidence that the building of this institution is located in a district of Budapest, which is called *Terézváros*, meaning Therese-city or Theresienstadt.

During the decades since the era of the Holocaust, these works which are important contributions to the Hungarian musical history, have only been appreciated in one newspaper article written by Antal Molnár in 1953, in the *Új Zenei Szemle*.

Separate essays were written about four martyr composers. Since the '60s the communist regime preferred the choruses of Sándor Vándor, György Justus and Sándor Kuti, exploiting the once leftist commitment of these composers. This was the time when writings, radio-talks, commemorations were made about worker-choruses, in which the commemorators tried to pose these composers as martyrs of the communist worker movement. Such writings were Andor Tiszay: *Ilyennek láttam*, or Ernő Vágó *Emlékezés a Vándor kórusra* (in Gyula Czigány ed. *Munkásének 1919–1945, A Magyar Munkásmozgalom és Zenekultúra a két világháború között* Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1967, Ernő Vágó *Vándor Sándor tanítványai. A Vándor Kórus története* Budapest: Táncsis, 1978). Unfortunately due to this unilateral presentation even the memory of other facets of their composing work (chamber music, instrumental music) has sunk into oblivion, while these are the very works which have preserved the musical imprint of the decades between the two world wars. We can learn of the life and works of the fourth composer László Weiner who died an early death, from music scholars Tibor Tallián and Ilona Kovács and the widow Vera Rózsa; (Tibor Tallián *Weiner László, 1916–1944* (Budapest: nk, 1994.), Ilona Kovács „Vissza a múltba. Részletek Weiner László zenei jegyzeteiből.” *Parlando* XLVIII/6 (2006) 40-44, Mária Feuer „Mókamester énekmester. Londoni beszélgetés Rózsa Verával” *Muzsika* 43/4 (2000. April): 27).

The life and art of the rest of the composers have been forgotten not only by the nation whose culture was enriched by them, but also by the closest environment, the majority of musicians and music historians.

I have set myself the aim to evoke this forgotten world.

## II. Sources

My research by nature can not include everyone, new names and new works may appear any time. I have often found only incomplete information about persons; there are even composers whose birth date could not have been recovered. Interviews made with witnesses, victims' family members, friends have contributed the majority of data. Since there are only a few written sources – mostly fragments – in this topic, the character of my research is in great part oral history. The books, old encyclopedias, newspaper articles, pictures, manuscripts of scores I use in my thesis were not only collected from several Hungarian libraries and archives, but also from private collections as well. The chapter *Perished composers* has been written by studying and using materials of several libraries and archives in Hungary and abroad (National Széchényi Library, the Library and the Archives of Franz Liszt University of Music, Budapest City Archives, The Library of Hungarian Academy of Sciences – Institute for Musicology, the Library of Jewish Theological Seminary – University of Jewish Studies, Budapest Holocaust Memorial Center, Yad Vashem Institute, the Archives of the Musikhochschule in Leipzig and the Ecole Normale Cortot in Paris) but many materials, pictures, works and oeuvres have disappeared without a trace. Through my research I have learned that I have to define who a composer is. Finally I have decided to choose those, whose works still exist, or those whose composer carrier we have knowledge about, even if there is not a single known piece by them.

The chapter *Perished musicians* contains mostly names. During my research I have often found information on lists of people deported, killed or disappeared (Halmos, Sándor szerk. *Nevek: A debreceni holokauszt mártírjai és túlélői* Debrecen: nk. 2004., Szita, Szabolcs *Halálerőd. A munkaszolgálat és a hadimunka történetéhez, 1944–45* Budapest: Kossuth, 1989, Pozsgai, Gézáné–Víg, Márta–Kontra, József *Emberek az embertelenségben. Emlékezés a*

*kunhegyesi zsidóságra és a holocaust áldozataira. Kunhegyesi helytörténeti füzetek* Kunhegyes: Kunhegyes város önkormányzata, 2004), in which not only names and birth dates were indicated, but professions as well. Studying these lists and books I have found musicians among thousands of names. Éva Vizi, than Head of *Names* Division at Budapest Holocaust Memorial Center has contributed to my research as well. I had to look after the names of many contemporary well-known musicians one by one. Artists appearing in the press of '20-'30s could have disappeared from the press after 1945 because they emigrated, finished their musical carrier or simply changed their names. Therefore I indicate only those musicians' names, by which I could affirm that they became martyrs. So the factual number of Hungarian victim musicians is probably higher. In this chapter I tried to organize the names by profession and location.

In the second chapter I study the connection between the musical life of Budapest and the Hungarian anti-Jewish laws. The Franz Liszt Academy of Music remained relatively protected institution for many years thanks to Jenő Hubay and Ernő Dohnányi. Using statistical figures of Viktor Karády's article (Karády, Viktor *Zsidóság Budapesten a 20. század első felében. Szociológiai bevezetés*, <http://karadyviktor.uni.hu/>), yearbooks of the Academy of Music and with the help of witnesses I try to demonstrate the status of the Jewish students at the Academy from the '20s to the Holocaust, and how the leaders of the musical society helped the ridden.

I write about OMIKE (Hungarian Jewish Educational Association, in Hungarian: Országos Magyar Izraelita Közművelődési Egyesület) an extraordinary organization, and their so called „Artist Action”. They tried to support artists who couldn't operate under the anti-Jewish laws: not only musicians but writers, painters, actors, helping them with opportunities to perform on stage. OMIKE has created a special „underground” cultural life in

Budapest during the WW2 with world famous artists, which was separated from Budapest's official cultural life.

In 1943 a new music school was founded in Budapest. The Goldmark Music School gathered the most excellent teachers, like Dezső Rados director, Pál Kadosa and Imre Ungár pianist, or Bence Szabolcsi musicologist, and they could teach Jewish youngsters until 19. March, 1944. It was unprecedented in contemporary Europe that unemployed Jewish musicians, teachers could carry on their profession legally in those years. The chapter mentions Jewish orchestras, home concerts, where the suffering artists could earn a little money.

In the third chapter I present three composers, Sándor Kuti, Sándor Vándor and László Weiner through analyzing their compositions for viola. Since studies have been written about them, I tried to collect new information and data about these composers.

Most of the data contained in Czigány Gyula ed. *Munkásének 1919–1945, A Magyar Munkásmozgalom és Zenekultúra a két világháború között*. Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1967 aligns with the information collected during my interview with Mrs. József Buzás, widow of Sándor Vándor. However the account of a witness, a member of the family can give a more authentic interpretation of the same story.

The appendix contains a catalogue of oeuvres of Sándor Vándor, Sándor Kuti, Mihály Nádor, Elemér Gyulai, György Justus and a catalogue of viola pieces of the era. I also collected and present the names of all the artists who participated in the Artist Action of OMIKE. One of the most peculiar parts of the dissertation is the gallery of lost artists. These pictures stem from archives, libraries, books, encyclopedias, newspapers, magazines and private collections, and often these are the last and only mementos of the artists.

### **III. Discussion**

The result of my research is a memorial tableau aimed to present all available information about the Hungarian martyr composers (Jenő Auspitz, Károly Bechtold, György Bondi, Pál Budai, Lajos Delej, László Erdősi, Géza Falk, Béla Gyémánt, László Gyopár, Elek Győri, Elemér Gyulai, Pál Horovitz, György Justus, Sándor Kuti, Walter Lajtai-Lazarus, Mihály Nádor, Tivadar Pallós, Miklós Rabetz, Aladár Rényi, Sándor Rozsnyai, Imre Sárosi, István Székely, Ödön Taubner, Sándor Vándor, Imre Vidor, László Weiner, Ferenc Weisz, Pál Zsigmondi).

Most of the composers were classical music composers, but among them there were jazz, operetta, film music composers, too.

Although not a victim of the Holocaust, Elemér Gyulai who helped and hid his persecuted friends, is also among the listed composers. In my opinion is he has to be commemorated by all means, because his fate was also dramatically influenced by history. We can learn from his widow's correspondence with Gyula Ortutay that after surviving the Second World War he became a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union. To our best present knowledge the catholic Elemér Gyulai is the only Hungarian composer who – similar to Wallenberg – became a victim of the soviet Gulag.

I direct accentuated attention on the killed musicians as well, because in contrary to the composers not even oeuvres are left to commemorate them. The Academy of Music, despite its promises (Kapitánffy István (ed.) *Zeneakadémia Évkönyve. 1944/45*. Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Főiskola kiadása, 1945) did not give an account of its losses of pupils after the Second World War. Naturally among the victims only a few could attend the Academy of Music in the '40s, since according to the anti-Jewish laws they were either expelled or not even admitted. But in some way, they too were connected to the spirituality of the Alma Mater.

My dissertation may contribute to the easing of this painful hiatus. During my research not once have I encountered a case that the spirituality of the

Academy of Music or the honor of the teachers would have had become flawed between 1920 and 1945. In contrary, the commemorators have all accentuated that the majority of participants and leaders of the musical society tried to help and ease the harshness for the persecuted who were handicapped by inhumane laws.

On one part the dissertation is musical history, on the other part it works with historical materials. It tries to commemorate, capture the moment as a photograph, and place their art into the course of Hungarian musical history despite being 60 years late.

#### **IV. Activity Connected to the Topic of the Thesis**

5. September, 2008: Old Academy of Music, „In Memoriam” concert – organizer, performer with F. Liszt Chamber Orchestra, Vilmos Szabadi, Márta Gulyás, Gergely Ittzés and Ditta Rohmann (Ödön Pártos: Yizkor for viola and chamber orchestra, Sándor Kuti: String Trio, László Weiner: Concerto for flute, viola, piano and chamber orchestra)

2008: Hungaroton CD „In Memoriam” HCD32597 – organizer, editor and performer (László Weiner: Duo for violin and viola with Vilmos Szabadi, Sándor Kuti: String Trio, Serenade, with Vilmos Szabadi and Ditta Rohmann.

2010-2011: „Missing Links” concert series – organizer, program editor, creator of a booklet, performer:

- 31. October, 2010: „Entrete Music” – compositions of Justus, Webern, Berg, Villa-Lobos, Kondor, Vándor, Bartók
- 13. March, 2011: „Old evenings” – compositions of Gyulai, Justus, Sárosi, Weisz, Pärt, Brahms



16. March, 2011: Interview in Hungarian Radio MR3 (riporter: László Győri, editor: Márta Katona)

13. September, 15. October, 2011: Bálint House, „Musical Stumbling Blocks” concert series organized by New Classical Music Agency – advisor, performer