

Theses of the DLA Doctoral Essay

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Dohnányi's Cadenzas for Mozart's Piano  
Concertos

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## **I. Background to the research**

Little was previously known about Dohnányi's recorded improvisations, which is not surprising, given that research into his life's work and the rediscovery of his works only began decades after his death. As an important step in the Dohnányi renaissance, a significant part of the composer's American heritage was returned home in several stages, i.e., in 2002, in 2006 and in 2014-2015, first to the newly founded Dohnányi Archive of the Institute of Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, then, after its dissolution in 2008 and further institutional changes, to the collection of the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> Century Hungarian Music Archive of the Institute for Musicology of the Research Center for the Humanities. This has made a number of manuscripts, documents and scores accessible, including some sources of the improvisations for Mozart's piano concertos, which are the subject of my thesis. As part of the American heritage, a recording of a 1956 concert was also brought home, in which the elderly Dohnányi plays two Mozart piano concertos with his own cadenza. Prior to this, the only other Dohnányi cadenzas we had known were from

the 1929 Rózsavölgyi edition of the Concerto in E-flat major for two pianos (K. 365), the 1909 Doblinger edition of the Piano Concerto in G major (K. 453) and the 1928 recording of the same concerto, where Dohnányi had acted both as a piano player and a conductor.

## **II. Sources**

The primary source for my work was Dohnányi's collected cadenza manuscripts, and I have relied exclusively on them for my analysis. Dohnányi also made written notes on the improvisations found in all twenty-five Mozart concertos for one piano, as well as in the two concert rondos (K. 382 in D major and K. 386 in A major). These notes have survived in the form of manuscript pencil sketches. The composer has also prepared for publication the self-penned improvisations of the concertos K. 271 in E flat major, K. 466 in D minor, K. 467 in C major, K. 482 in E flat major, K. 488 in A major, K. 491 in C minor, K. 503 in C major, K. 537 in D major and K. 595 in B flat major. In the end, the publication did not materialize, but it can be assumed that

Dohnányi treated the selected works with special attention, so in my essay I have undertaken to present, analyze and evaluate these nine concerto-cadenzas and their context. I also dealt with those recordings of Mozart piano concertos in which Dohnányi had been playing.

In my research, I have extensively studied Dohnányi's Mozart repertoire, not only as a concerto-performer but also as a solo pianist, conductor and chamber musician. I also listed the performances broadcasted by Hungarian Radio. I have not found any substantial information on the performance of the cadenzas in the press of the time.

Concerning my overview of the related terminology and the history of genres, I have drawn on the analyses of Paul Badura-Skoda, Christoph Wolff and Robert D. Levin for Mozart's own cadenzas, while in respect of the 18<sup>th</sup> century performance practice and Mozart's improvisational ability I relied on a related study written by Katalin Komlós. The above was complemented by Balázs Fülel's doctoral thesis, which provided valuable information, especially on the general definition and historical background of cadenzas. I also

examined recordings of the generation of pianists of Dohnányi's time, without trying to be exhaustive. Kenneth Hamilton's *After the Golden Age* has proved to be a very enlightening read on 20<sup>th</sup> century pianistic performance practice.

### **III. Method**

I have approached the topic from several perspectives. The main pillar of my thesis is cadenza analysis. I examined the thematic improvisations of the first movements in terms of their structure, theme management as well as their tonal and harmonic relationships. I have dealt separately with the cadenzas and Eingangs of the second and third movements. In all the recordings of Dohnányi's piano playing, we can hear his own improvisations, so I had the opportunity to compare his performance with the cadenza manuscripts.

The exploration of Dohnányi's rich Mozart repertoire provided a suitable context for the study and analysis of his cadenzas. Dohnányi's collection of music sheets must also be mentioned here: although Dohnányi presumably played his own cadenzas for all the concertos

– so from his point of view it is irrelevant what kind of improvisation was published in the given edition – his scores give the viewer an idea of how the publishers of the time approached the cadenzas.

In the section providing my overview of the history of genres, I have tried to summarize the factors that are criteria for good cadenza, using indirectly the descriptions of theorists, while also making use of Fülei's work mentioned above. The study of Mozart's own cadenzas and Eingangs provided a picture of Mozart's ideas on improvisation, which – despite the marked differences between the 18<sup>th</sup>-century performance practices and those followed by Dohnányi' – served as a starting point for my Dohnányi analysis.

The sound recordings capturing the performances of Dohnányi's contemporaries provide an insight into the performance practice of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I have chosen recordings of pianists whom Dohnányi invited to be part of the jury of the 1933 Liszt Competition he organized, clearly showing that Dohnányi regarded their artistic work as exemplary, and I have also looked at recordings of the concerto

performances of Arthur Rubinstein, another artist admired also by Dohnányi. I was primarily interested in which cadenza Dohnányi's contemporaries chose when performing a given Mozart concerto.

#### **IV. Results**

In my thesis I set out to study Ernő Dohnányi's cadenzas for Mozart's piano concertos. The main conclusion of the analyses carried out is that Dohnányi's cadenzas and Eingangs are recorded improvisations with a well-thought-out, rather consistent concepts in terms of their thematic and structural aspects and the way how the melodies and harmonies are managed. Their shaping power lies not only in Dohnányi's perspective as a composer, but also as a performer, where the latter is greatly enhanced by the cadenza composer's extensive knowledge of the repertoire.

In a concerto, the cadenza provided the opportunity for the performers and pianist-composers to do improvisation or act as a "co-producer", and this is also the most tangible point of contact between Mozart and Dohnányi. As a result of my research, it is almost

certain that Dohnányi knew some of Mozart's documented improvisations, yet he wrote cadenzas and entrances for all the piano concertos.

After a review of the relevant terminology and the history of genres, I found that while in Mozart's case the role of the cadenza within the concerto is to embellish the musical cadence, in the original meaning of the word, Dohnányi's improvisations – like those of his contemporaries – are much more wide-ranging. The majority of the Eingangs are in balance with their corresponding movements, and are not characterized by excessive traits in terms of harmonies and their scope. In contrast, cadenzas are often disproportionately long. The wide-ranging palette of dynamics, the handling of themes and tonality as well as the harmonic processes are all based on the late Romantic phraseology, and in particular on the Brahms-inspired idiom.

However, despite all the extremes, and in comparison with the cadenza recordings of his contemporaries, especially those of Backhaus and Fischer, it is noticeable that Dohnányi considers the main movements as a collective starting point, in most cases he



is respectful of them and has no intention to view them as competitors to be surpassed.

