

DLA Doctoral Thesis

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A Genre in Illegality – Mass Compositions in Hungary between 1949 and 1969

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1. Background of the research

The present dissertation originates in the topics of my two previous theses, in which I conducted research on the organ works and ordinary masses of an almost unknown Hungarian composer, Gábor Lisznyay Szabó. After writing a thesis on Lisznyay's masses, it was evident that I must think about the mass repertoire of the Lisznyay contemporaries in Hungary. This is the way I arrived at the often unknown mass compositions of the most exciting two decades of the twentieth century – at least from the point of view of church music -, the period between 1949 and 1969. The pieces of the repertoire could not become parts of Hungarian musical life because of the anti-church atmosphere of the era. Most of these compositions were made for the drawer, while others could be performed in the liturgy or – often decades later – on concerts. However, still they were surrounded by silence for years.

That is why practically there is no existing literature about the masses of this period. Some summarizing works about the Magyar Kórus era (1930-1950) can be seen as sources, and there are some works summarizing the ongoing processes in the church music of the examined decades: Artúr Harmat: *Hazai katolikus egyházi zenénk ezer éve*, László Dobszay: *Jelenkori művelődési áramlatok – a hazai egyházzene tükrében*, László Tardy: *A magyar katolikus egyházi zene és ének*, and *Magyar egyházzenei kompozíciók a zsinat után*. Here we can mention one chapter from the Kodály monograph,

titled *Forma, harmónia, ellenpont* of Anna Dalos which describes the formation of the Magyar Kórus periodical. There are some works about singular composers in which we can find information about their masses as well. The most important ones are the following: the Lajtha monograph of Emőke Solymosi Tari, titled *Két világ közt, Vallomások zenéről – Farkas Ferenc válogatott írásai* edited by László Gombos and a Lisznyay memorial book collecting the reminiscence of Gábor Lisznyay Szabó's friends.

Dobszay – in his above mentioned article - is very critical of the church music of the era, however, he primarily analyses the effects of the Second Vatican Council, the Magyar Kórus and the emergence of congregational masses. The evaluation of the mass composers of the era is strikingly missing. Tardy, however, mentions several times that the repertoire is worthy of note, much richer than it could be expected as a result of the historical tendencies of the era.

2. Sources

The most important sources to get acquainted with the mass repertoire are the masses themselves, the most of which is still unpublished. The scripts are stored in the following places: Széchenyi National Library, Music Collection (the masses of Artúr Harmat, György Kósa, Gábor Lisznyay Szabó, Ferenc Ottó), the parish church of Terézváros in Budapest (Lisznyay's works), St. Stephen's Basilica (masses of Deák Bárdos, Harmat, Hidas, Koloss),

Matthias Church (masses of Kálmán Dobos, József Sári, László Sály, Imre Szilas, Ottó Vincze, Alajos Werner). The works of Alajos Tamás can be found at the Alajos Tamás Foundation, the Halmoscripts at the Carmelite church of Győr, the inheritance of Ferenc Ottó at the Archives of Gödöllő, Lajtha's *Missa in tono phrygio* at the Modern Music Archive of the Hungarian Institute for Musicology. I obtained the masses of Farkas and Hidas at the St. Leslie's Church of Kőbánya. Some works could be obtained from the authors, relatives or performers.

The issues of the Magyar Kórus periodical provided essential help, just as György Kroó's *A magyar zeneszerzés 30 éve* for the tendencies of Hungarian composition, *A Magyar Katolikus Püspöki Kar Tanácskozásai 1949–1965 között* edited by Margit Balogh and Ignác Romsics's *Magyarország története a XX. században* to depict the historical background.

3. Method

I started examining the repertory by looking at the catalogue of the library of the Hungarian University of Music, and the list of works of the composers. Then I visited three church music centers in Budapest, St. Stephen's Basilica, Matthias Church and St. Theresa Church where I could search in the collection of scores by the leadership of the local church musicians. This was supplemented by examining the scripts at the Music Collection of the Széchenyi

National Library. I had personal contact with several composers (Pál Károlyi, László Sáy, József Soproni) and the relatives of the already deceased ones (Kristóf Dobos, Ágnes Dobszay, Mária Lisznyay, Márta Kovács and Judit Patachich). I made interviews with Ágnes Dobszay, Pál Károlyi, Mária Lisznyay, József Soproni and László Tardy.

The exploration of the repertoire was followed by the analysis of the works. During this procedure the emphasis was on the formal structure, the style definition and liturgical function. Short biographical summary was also made about the most important composers. I put the analysed compositions into the context of that era of Hungarian music history, while drawing the historical background, emphasizing the relation between the masses and the historical events.

4. Results

Present dissertation is the first to collect the masses of this era (1949-1969), an era that has been hardly explored period of the Hungarian church music.

Today's Hungarian church musicians tend to put an equality sign between the mass repertory of the discussed two decades and the compositions of the composers of the Magyar Kórus circle, often written in an overdue style, or the congregational masses written after the Second Vatican Council. However, my research verifies

that the composers of the repertoire – apart from a few exceptions – are not identical to the Magyar Kórus circle's members. We can find the most significant composers of the era (Lajtha, Farkas) among the mass writers, just as well as some hardly known personalities (Lisznyay, Ferenc Ottó, Ottó Vincze) or the youngest generation (Dobos, Dobszay, Hidas, Károlyi, Sári, Sáy). This rich repertoire shows a very wide variety concerning style: the main tendencies of the twentieth century can be traced, along with the style of Kodály, Stravinsky, the Polish avantgarde, dodecaphony or beat music.

The antecedents of the period are summarised in the beginning of the thesis – the activities of the Magyar Kórus, reflecting on the masses, introducing the most significant mass composers of the circle (Harmat, Bárdos, Deák Bárdos, Halmos). I offer a detailed analysis of the two masses composed by László Lajtha, the most important mass writer of the fifties, emphasizing his extraordinary formal thinking and the several stylistic layers of his music. I would like to draw the attention to Gábor Lisznyay Szabó, one of the most talented and most underrated composers of the Magyar Kórus circle. His emblematic Mass No. 11 is dealt with special care, and I also survey his other mass compositions born during the two examined decades, demonstrating the gradual change of his style. With the analysis of the masses of Dobos, Dobszay, Farkas, Károlyi, Patachich and Sáy I would like to point at the diversity of styles in this genre, showing how the most modern musical trends of the era appeared.

One of the most important results of the present dissertation is that it reveals the relation between the historical events (Communist takeover, Revolution in 1956, Second Vatican Council) and the genesis of the mass compositions, as well as it investigates the works from the point of view of the liturgical function, paying attention to the works which are suitable for church practice.

V. Documentation of the activity related to the subject matter of the dissertation

Compositional activity

From the beginning of my compositional activity I have been interested in the genre of mass. My completed works in this field: Missa omni tempore (2005) and Messe de mariage (2009).

Choir accompanying activity

Between 2003 and 2013 as the organist of the St. Leslie Parish Church, Budapest-Kőbánya and as the accompanist of other choirs, I had the opportunity to get acquainted with many of the most important mass compositions from the point of view of the performer in the liturgy. Among these compositions I performed several masses of the investigated period (Missa prima of Bárdos, Missa simplex of Lisznyay, Missa Hungarica of Farkas, Missa e sole

of Halmos, Missa brevis and Missa in honorem Reginae Pacis of Hidas). The involvement in several performances of Lajtha's Magnificat helped me to study the Lajtha Masses more intensely.

Lisznyay's Mass No. 11 was performed by the Vass Lajos Choir of the Hungarian Pedagogues of Slovakia (conducted by Árpád Tóth) on the 7th of March, 2007 in the Matthias Church, Budapest, from the score edited by me. According to my subsequent research this event was possibly the first performance of the work.

Theses

Horváth, Márton Levente: *Lisznyay Szabó Gábor, az ismeretlen organista-zeneszerző*. Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, 2006. (Manuscript).

Horváth, Márton Levente: *Lisznyay Szabó Gábor miséi*. Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, 2007. (Manuscript).