

Thesises of DLA doctoral dissertation

Péter Kiss

Interpretation of the notation of Kurtág on the  
example of the piece Games

Supervisor: András Wilhelm

Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music

28<sup>th</sup> Doctoral School of Arts and Cultural History

Budapest

2018

## I. Antecedents of the Research

The subject matter of my doctoral dissertation is the presentation, inspection and interpretation of the unconventional notation of György Kurtág through the pieces of the series titled *Games* (in Hungarian: *Játékok*). Although an increasing number of both Hungarian and international publications deal with György Kurtág, a relatively small portion of these deal with the notation of the works and with the interpretation of their notation. And although the books on general musical notations and essays on the usage of new musical notes in the twentieth century can help in understanding the history of musical notation development and in exploring how the various new techniques are noted down, the world of Kurtág and its imprints in the works are not even mentioned in these writings. My general knowledge has been to a large extent increased by Kurt Stone: *Music Notation in the Twentieth Century*, and by Erhard Karkoschka: *Das Schriftbild der Neuen Music*, and especially by the summary tables published in the latter book. To me it was specially interesting to read the chapter called *New notation – communication instrument or an end in itself?* in the *Selected writings of György Ligeti*, discussing the topic of the differences and interoperability concerning notation and musical graphics.

While searching for further literature on György Kurtág, several writings had come to finally constitute the background of my paper. From these works, let me highlight *Kurtág, the author who cannot be analysed*, a study by Anna Dalos, *Daily*, an essay by András Wilhelm, and *György Kurtág*, a book by Bálint András Varga in the form of a series of interviews with the author, containing several important pieces of information.

## II. Sources

The primary source of my dissertation is a video and sound recording from 2003, consisting of 18 DVD discs, in which György Kurtág gives lectures on the pieces of the *Games* series to Gábor Csalog within the framework of a master course, in connection to the publication of a complete sound recording of *Games*, which was recorded in those days. In my opinion, the modern recording of the teaching practice, gestures and piano playing of a living author might be invaluable documents for a scientific essay, as they can provide the most accurate answer to many questions emerging in relation to the topic.

The second basic source of the dissertation is the first seven published books of the *Games* series and the key belonging to them, as well as the available manuscripts that are interesting from the point of view of notation, on

which I rely in the chapters dealing with the review and possible realization of the occurring novel notes, and in my analyses to be found in the second part of my paper.

### **III. Method**

The materials used in the dissertation, belonging to the recordings of the aforementioned master course, are supposed to support the various concerns of interpretation and the possible solutions. During my analyses I relied on my experience gained so far before comparing any given point to the teachings of Kurtág. The huge video recording material had not been organized before and I found it rather useless from the point of view of my study in its original form as it was an extremely time-consuming procedure to find the teachings related to any specific work. Therefore, prior to setting to work, I made a precise catalogue of the entire work, which identifies by the disc and the time code where the various works are to be found. I attach this catalogue as an appendix to my dissertation, as it makes it possible to easily find all the references therein. The discs whose only specimen I used for the preparation of this work of mine will be accessible to the public in the Library of the Budapest Music Center together with the catalogue that I have prepared.

#### **IV. Results**

For the first time, I came to know the music of Kurtág at the beginning of my studies at the Music Academy, within the framework of a summer master course of Gábor Csalog. This work, which increased and deepened in the course of time, led to the foundation of the Ludium Ensemble, which intended to deeply understand and to perform the works of the author. A major event of the history of this ensemble was a concert where the author also appeared and where he then gave a speech to evaluate the concert in a very moving manner. It was this period in my life to come to the idea that I intended to deal in my dissertation with the analysis and interpretation of his works and their notation.

Primarily it was a basic question whether any valid interpretation of the works of Kurtág were possible without the personal instructions of the author, which turned, after the preparation of this paper of mine, into a question that can be answered. Studying his works led me to realize that all of the works of Kurtág can be understood with appropriate humility and accuracy, with the knowledge of the laws and traditions of the old musical works, and with appropriate phantasy and openness. However, the recordings on his teaching, gestures, thoughts and basic musical thinking contribute to a great extent to the understanding of the new kinds of notations occurring.

## **V. Documentation of the Activities Relevant to the Topic of the Dissertation**

In relation to the subject matter of this dissertation I have scheduled various parts of the *Games* series by Kurtág to many of my concerts. Besides these, I gave lectures in parallel with a master course on the special notations of the author and on their interpretation in Romania, Iceland and China. However, it is the Academy of Music where I can make the best use of my knowledge gathered in relation to this field, in my teaching practice.