

THESIS OF DLA DISSERTATION

ESZTER KRULIK

LIGETI'S COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES IN THE LIGHT OF
STRING WORKS, FROM EARLY WORKS TO THE VIOLIN
CONCERTO

Consultant: András Wilhelm

Franz Liszt Academy of Music
Doctoral School No. 28 of Arts and Cultural History

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I. Research Background

Topic of my dissertation is a direct continuation of my Master studies: my finals concert in Glasgow – together with my MA thesis – was Berg’s Violin Concerto and my Budapest finals concert’s program included Bartók’s Violin Concerto. Thorough examination of these two pieces prepared me for studying such a 20th century composer’s concerto from the end of the century who – in spite of his Hungarian roots – integrates traditions from Europe and beyond into his art. In order to understand Ligeti, it is essential to know his personal historical background, the family tragedy caused by WW2, and the preposterous circumstances of Hungary during the postwar years. Even though it is not part of my topic, I tried to outline Ligeti’s psychobiography in the 1st chapter – highlighting the important family and historical events that had predestined his fate and possibly his style.

Nowadays it is more and more common to analyze Ligeti, dissertations, articles, or even books keep popping up from all parts of the world. I believe that there is no international consensus on his creative periods; most studies rely mainly on the composer’s texts about his pieces. This is why Márton Kerékfy’s Ph.D. dissertation, *The Influence of East European Folk Music on the Music of György Ligeti*, which takes a completely new approach, pointing out the latently present compositional means through the examination of manuscripts, notes, and drafts.

II. Sources

There were two main sources of my research: Richard Steinitz: *György Ligeti and The Collected Writings of György Ligeti*, edited and translated by Márton Kerékfy. Moreover, I used Márton Kerékfy’s Ph.D. dissertation, *The Influence of Eastern-European Folk Music on the Music of György Ligeti*. Eckhard Roelke’s and Péter Várnai’s interview books contained many interesting details. I mostly used the Ligeti scores published by Schott Publishing House for the analysis.

III. Method

The Concerto, which is the main topic of my dissertation, is a unique piece in Ligeti's oeuvre. It does not have any connection with any other 20th century concertos, even though its layers are composed of only traditional compositional topics. However, the combination of these layers, and the simultaneous use of such compositional means that are centuries apart from each other, creates an exceptional, unique tone – that cannot be categorized into any doctrines or authorial groups. The first half of my dissertation concentrates on pieces that were composed before the Concerto, and are in close connection with violin or string instruments, and by this – according to my hypothesis – they had influenced the character of the Concerto. Analysis being my main method, I also study historical documents, and try to understand and show the sources that inspired the pieces and the factors shaping their creation. When studying the stringed compositional styles, I present different characteristics of the composer's different creative periods. The second half of my dissertation concentrates on the Concerto, composed in the last big period of the career – based on the “recycled” elements of the previously analysed earlier pieces.

IV. Results

In 2006 MÜPA launched its 10-year long series where – for the first time in Hungary – Ligeti's whole oeuvre was performed. In the scope of this series – as a performer at some concerts – I connected with Ligeti's ensemble works and concertos for real.

As a stringed instrument player it was a real challenge for me to play these pieces on the violin. The main lesson for me was that with detailed analysis almost all technical difficulties could be overcome if we understand the motives and ultimate aims of the composer, if we unmask his *seemingly* unsolvable compositional means, we immediately have the key to a precise, well-considered and authentic performance. My thesis first and foremost aims to help active musicians, give them guidance for the scores of Ligeti that seem to be chaotic at first sight. Presenting compositional means returning from time to time in the oeuvre, and explaining their hypothetical roles makes the seemingly difficult pieces transparent in an instant.

V. Documentation of activities related to the subject of the dissertation

In the followings, I will list all concerts of pieces from the oeuvre of György Sándor Ligeti in which I have participated.

27 May 2006, Palace of Arts, Béla Bartók National Concerthall, Budapest

Hommage à Ligeti

UMZE Ensemble

Ligeti: Chamber concerto

Ligeti: Violin concerto

Conductor: Zoltán Rácz

19 March 2007, Italian Culturinstitute, Budapest

Budapest Spring Festival

UMZE Ensemble

Ligeti: Violin concerto

Conductor: Zoltán Rácz

23 August 2007, Kampnagel, Hamburg

Schleswig-Holstein Festival

UMZE Ensemble

Ligeti: Chamber concerto

Ligeti: Violin concerto

Conductor: Zoltán Rácz

28 May 2008, Palace of Arts, Béla Bartók National Concerthall, Budapest

Hommage à Ligeti

UMZE Ensemble

Ligeti: Ramifications

Conductor: Zoltán Rácz

31 March 2013, Archa Theatre, Prague

Prague Spring Festival

Ostravska Banda
Ligeti: Piano concerto
Conductor: Petr Kotik

29 August 2015, Philharmonic Hall, Ostrava

Ostrava Days 2015

Ostravska Banda
Ligeti: Double concerto for flute and oboe
Conductor: Petr Kotik

16 February 2016, Budapest Music Center, Budapest

Kurtág 90 Festival

UMZE Ensemble
Ligeti: Celloconcerto
Conductor: Zoltán Rác

18 January 2018, Tivoli Vredenburg, Utrecht

Insomnio Ensemble
Ligeti: Cello concerto
Ligeti: Violin concerto
Ligeti: Piano concerto
Conductor: Ulrich Pohl