

Propositions of DLA dissertation

# The Church Music of László Lajtha

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## Propositions

### I. Research background

My interest in the music of László Lajtha goes back to my high school years. As a member of the Symphony Orchestra of the Szent István Secondary Grammar School, I had the opportunity to play contemporary music besides many classical pieces. Openness to novelty is necessary for playing new music.

I had the privilege of being taught by several composers at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music. Kamilló Lendvay, Iván Madarász, György Orbán were among my professors. I had the opportunity to meet also the wife of composer Rudolf Maros, Klára Molnár. She led me further along this way of not to be afraid of any unknown composition.

After graduation, as a young conductor and teacher, I was pleased to conduct 20th century or contemporary music. I felt young students of music must play the works of Endre Szervánszky or Pál Járdányi.

Cooperating as a conductor with Zugló Philharmony I met Emőke Solymosi Tari, who gave an impetus to discovering the works of Lajtha. Since my conductor's repertoire largely consists of oratorical pieces and because the sacral music of the 1950's reflect a strong personality, I chose the church pieces by Lajtha.

The amount of literature on László Lajtha is not proportionate to the role he played in the 20th century history of Hungarian music. The most significant publications have been written by Melinda Berlász, János Breuer, Emőke Solymosi Tari and

József Ujfalussy. Each author is committed dealing with László Lajtha's life, whose relatively scarce documentation has left an abundance of unknown areas in his works of life. We have some exact data about the years Lajtha spent in Paris, however, some false suppositions were credited for a long time. Lajtha's international appreciation is illustrated with significant examples in the literature.

## II. Sources

The writings by László Lajtha can be separated into several groups. His encyclopedia articles, written scholarly publications and radio talks are all intended for publicity; his foreign and partly family correspondence also provide excellent illustration of an important part of the history of music. *Chapters on László Lajtha (Fejezetek Lajtha Lászlóról)* by János Breuer, *The collected writings of László Lajtha I (Lajtha László összegyűjtött írásai I.)* by Melinda Berlász, or the writings of Emőke Solymosi Tari and József Ujfalussy are all publications of the same academic level as the different compilations by László Lajtha (*Széki gyűjtés, Szépkényerű-Szentmártoni gyűjtés, Kőrispataki gyűjtés, Dunántúli táncok és dallamok*) published in 1954, 1955 and 1962 by Editio Musica Budapest.

## III. Method

This dissertation is an analytic work. Beyond the musical harmonies and applied composer's techniques, however, there is an emphasis on the examination of spiritual elements. With a knowledge of the age in which Lajtha created music, his personality can be traced in his musical arrangements. I have been deeply moved by his way of being profoundly touched by the words and pouring them into

music. The strong emphasis on this aspect makes my work different from other analytic dissertations.

Comparing Lajtha's church music to his instrumental works or other compositions of the period, individual style characteristics can be described and freedom can be sensed from his musical creations.

His writing about the common roots of the Gregorian chant and folk songs raised the question whether a composer's field of interest can be traced in his compositions.

#### IV. Results

Our knowledge of the history of music has been enhanced by my research, since the debut of the *Phrygian Mass (Fríg mise)* has proved to have been just a broadcast musical recording instead of live transmission. The first Mass by Lajtha was broadcast on the Radio in the evening of the 9th September 1957. As a result of my research, we may have a greater knowledge of the circumstances of the first presentation. According to the witness of the books carefully compiled by Sándor Antal, the Radio Orchestra founded by Lajtha in 1945 was rehearsing a completely different program in the days around the debut, the recording of the Mass by Lajtha having taken place in June of the same year.

Some future results can also be reported. Once in possession of some of his foreign recordings, we will be able to discover also the performer Lajtha's strong points; the performance of his ballet *Capriccio* will provide a wider picture of the composer himself. Rights inheritors Csilla Gyurkó and Tünde Gyurkó are making efforts at acquiring the soundtrack of the *Mass* recorded in Paris.

The debut of the ballet, never presented with a dance performance before, is planned for the spring of 2017.

It is about Lajtha's composition techniques that my analyses reveal the most. The composer creates his imitations with exceptional abundance and wonderful simplicity at the same time. The inner imitational character of his one part themes for either an instrument or singer's voice is special. According to the characteristics of a theme, he superposes the theme and its translations, bringing a four note theme below eight notes even three times, prompting the performer to strong intellectual awareness. The essence of his motivic thinking and free application of imitations is that he prefers the originality of his melodies to harmony among parts. Regarding the first notes of entering parts, the dux and the comes rarely follow one another at an interval of a perfect fifth or perfect fourth; because of the free texture, any interval may occur.

In his choral compositions of church music, he likes writing long melismas, his fourth and fifth parallels and mixturas are characteristic. His simple and easily sung patterns are built from one cell, his melodies largely consist of series of second steps. His musical language is deeply influenced by his profound knowledge and love of the Gregorian chant and the folk song. In his church music he assigns performing dissonances to the organ or the symphony orchestra, the choral themes are soaring and nicely formed.

Asynchrony is found in Lajtha's compositions. In his *Motetta*, there is notable difference in the note range of the parts. While there is chromaticism in the instrumental accompaniment, the singer has diatonic portions. In his *Mass* with organ, the formation

method of the Gregorian greatly differs from the early Renaissance practice. For example, in the age of Dufay, it was possible for the Gregorian plain chant section to be followed by a freely constructed polyphonic section; Lajtha just turns around the time of using the instrument, in this case the organ. His freely constructed four-part choral sections are sung a cappella, then his own Gregorian-like sections are given organ accompaniment. In the same piece of music I experienced that partition, breath pauses or significant changes of the musical material of the instrument can be heard at different places in the choral and organ parts. The connecting points between musical and textual lines are interweaved with the instrumental motivic material.

Lajtha's church music compositions abound in harmonic movements reminiscent of the Renaissance; the usage of plagal movements and empty fifths is characteristic. Mixtures of triads or multiple alternations of shapes of identical or different situations of neighbouring triads are often found. The composer likes applying the version arranged into the diverging lines of force of the parts on the two extremes.

He hides, often mirrors, turns, transforms his patterns. The „BACH” pattern is often intermingled in his musical compositions.

The cross-pattern of Liszt is sol-la-do, that of Lajtha is the cambiata pattern fa-re-mi.

His rotating patterns of 4-5-6 notes woven from the above cells or movements can be well applied for creating unisonous internal imitation.



## V. Documentation of activity related to topics of dissertation

26th April 2013, 19:00 Duna Palota – Theatre Hall

6th Spring season ticket performance of the Duna Symphony  
Orchestra

Lajtha: Sinfonietta for string orchestra Op.43 (1946)

The Duna Symphony Orchestra was conducted by Gergely Ménesi