

DLA Thesis Abstract

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The *Clarinet Concerto* of Sándor Veress

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I. Antecedents of the research

I first heard of the *Clarinet Concerto* by Sándor Veress during my studies in Switzerland. Thomas Friedli, my professor in Geneva asked me the question whether or not I was familiar with this masterpiece? I had to admit that unfortunately I had never even heard the name of the composer in spite of being Hungarian. Friedli passed away soon after this conversation, and this unfortunate fact deprived me of talking about the concerto with him any further.

It was not until a few years later that I rediscovered the concerto. I started to practice it, and it grew on me very quickly. I started to realize that it might just be one of the most significant compositions written for the clarinet in the last century. Besides it proved to be very challenging. The question arose: why hadn't the concerto found its rightful place in the basic clarinet repertoire to this day? And why isn't Veress's music played more often in Hungary? I have found these questions intriguing enough to make this topic the subject of my DLA research.

Veress's work is built using twelve-tone composition, therefore it seemed to be a good idea to compare it with another Hungarian clarinet concerto, written by Endre Szervánszky that uses the same

compositional technique. However, the work of Veress soon showed that it provides enough material by itself, thus I had to abandon the piece of Szervánszky.

II. Sources

In writing the biographical chapter I primarily relied upon three sources. Firstly, I used musicologist János Demény's study about Veress's oeuvre that appeared in a study collection honoring the composer on his 75th birthday.¹ Secondly, I found the conversation-series between musicologist Ferenc Bónis and the composer from 1985 rather detailed and important.² And lastly, the study of the German musicologist Andreas Traub, that appeared in a study collection published for Veress's 80th birthday, has proved to be a helpful source as well.³

Regarding the analysis, the central piece of the thesis, the most important source was the study of the concerto by Traub.⁴ Apart from that, the program notes

¹ János Demény: „Veress Sándor – Életművázlat”. In: Melinda Berlász (ed): *Veress Sándor*. Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1982. 12-57.

² Ferenc Bónis: *Üzenetek a XX. századból*. Budapest: Püske, 2002. 108-135.

³ Andreas Traub: „Sándor Veress. Lebensweg – Schaffensweg”. In: Andreas Traub (ed): *Sándor Veress. Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag*. Berlin: Haseloff, 1986. 22-99

⁴ Andreas Traub: „Sándor Veress. Konzert für Klarinette und Orchester”. *Melos* 49 (January 1987): 65-84.

written by the composer for the first performance of the piece were also an essential aid.⁵ Heinz Holliger and Claudio Veress kindly helped me to clear up some problematical issues that arose during the work. And finally, I gained some ideas by reading the review of a recording of the *Clarinet Concerto* by Anna Dalos.⁶

While writing about the notable performances and performers, I mainly relied upon the memoirs of the persons in question, József Tönköly and László Horváth. Unfortunately, with the untimely death of Friedli one of the most authentic sources of the *Concerto* was silenced. The piece was not only dedicated to him, Friedli had worked on it with Veress before the premiere, which was also given by him, and later while making a recording, he would have been able to run his ideas by the composer, who was present during the process. Were he still alive he could have answered all of the questions that remain ambiguous.

III. Method

As I was getting more and more acquainted with the composer's life, I came to the realization that a detailed

⁵ Andreas Traub (ed): *Sándor Veress. Aufsätze, Vorträge, Briefe*. Hofheim: Wolke, 1998. 127-128.

⁶ Dalos Anna: „Határátlépések. Veress Sándor művei új felvételeken”. *Muzsika* 47/3 (March 2004): 35-38.

biography containing every important detail of his life has yet to be released. Every one of them available in print is missing one or two remarkable episodes of his life, therefore I felt the need to start my treatise with some biographical aspects of Veress, trying to interweave the data of the different sources. However, the main subject of my work not being the life of Veress, I could only sketch in the most important events.

The primary aspect of the concerto's analysis is the following: how does Veress use the twelve-tone compositional technique and how does he modify it to suit his musical style? To quote a writing of his, the principal idea of the first movement is to evaluate the twelve notes of the chromatic scale in various harmonic constellations without following the rules of serialism. The second movement is mainly a dance in which the same original twelve-note technique is found. Despite not following the Schoenbergian system of rules, Veress consequently insists on using a spectrum containing all of the twelve notes, in which the newly introduced notes always appear in places of great significance. By demonstrating these I attempt to show the notable spots of the work, be it related to structure or interpretation. The other viewpoint of the analysis is examining two short motives: the half tone-two half tones motion and the Doppelschlag-motive. By listing all the appearances

of these two motives I make an attempt to show how the composition is formed and shaped by them.

I also found it important to put the concerto in historical context therefore I included information about the notable performers, the first performance and the first Hungarian performance.

Finally, approaching the piece from a performer's view seemed necessary as well. Writing about the recordings is justified by the fact that there were only four of them available at the time of writing. Additionally, in almost all of them several mistakes each of a different nature can be found. And lastly, examining the printed music available for future performers, revealing their different inadequacies is indispensable for the sake of authentic interpretation.

IV. Results

Researching the life of the composer I stumbled upon two subjects that are somewhat poorly documented in Hungarian sources. One is the question of emigration from Hungary, the other is a long but never fulfilled desire to move to America. In my opinion knowing these facts could lead to a better understanding of the composer's personality and music.

The analysis of the concerto could help its future performers to a deeper insight regarding the interpretation of the work, furthermore it could serve as an addition to a potential study about Veress's dodecaphony.

In my opinion, an important achievement of the thesis is the clearing up of misunderstandings about the circumstances of the first Hungarian performance, which were inaptly quoted by the available reviews. Furthermore, I discovered an interesting piece of information: the organizers of the Basel concert series honoring the 80th birthday of Veress chose the *Clarinet Concerto* – among other rarely played works – to represent the composer's oeuvre and to be played on this special occasion.

Another important achievement could be the partial clarification of the typographical errors in the printed music and the differences appearing in the various sources. The sources available to me during my research proved to be insufficient regarding all the problematic issues, the further explorations of these problems could not be realized without the examination of the autograph sources, which are currently in the ownership of the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel.

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

From the compositions of Veress written for the clarinet, I had the opportunity to perform the juvenile *Sonatine* in concert with oboist Nóra Salvi and bassoonist István Hartenstein. The concert took place in the Székely Bertalan Hall at the Hungarian Opera House on 13 February, 2016. Additionally, I have started to learn the other trio titled *Introduzione e Coda*, and the *Clarinet Concerto*, both of which I would like to program in the near future.