

DLA Thesis
English summary

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**THE WORK OF ZSIGMOND SZATHMÁRY
IN THE PERFORMING ARTS**

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I. Background of the research

The reason for choosing this subject for the doctoral dissertation is the very fact that a general overview and comprehensive of Zsigmond Szathmáry's (*1939) life work has not yet been written in Hungarian. One of the reasons behind this is that the excellent organist and composer has been living in Germany for close to 60 years. At the same time he plays an active part in the Hungarian musical life. Szathmáry visited Hungary for the first time in 1982 as a private individual and has been performing concerts as an organist and composer since then. Szathmáry's pieces are played by other performers and he regularly holds master courses.

Zsigmond Szathmáry's rich life work was the subject of a monograph (*Magier der Klänge. Der Komponist und Organist Zsigmond Szathmáry*) written in German by the German organist and composer Dominik Susteck in 1977. The research work for the monograph concluded in 2012 and the book was published by Bärenreiter Verlag in 2013. Susteck's book on Szathmáry is a sound piece of work; however the German musician

focused primarily on the Hungarian musician's work in Germany. Therefore, I considered the exploration of Szathmáry's life and education in Hungary and his oeuvre which has been enriched ever since, the assessment and research of the interconnected and independent values of each field of music a very significant task. I attempted to carry out this task with the approach of a Hungarian musician and a former student.

The basis for my research was the two academic years (2003–2005) I spent under the tutelage of Zsigmond Szathmáry at Freiburg University of Music in Germany. During this time, I was able to experience the wide range of his musical expertise, his deep knowledge of the organ literature, the history and the playing possibilities of the instrument and the specific manner of his teaching work and its effectiveness. Szathmáry retired and I spent another two years under the tutelage of his successor, Martin Schmeding; however, our relationship remained intact as he continued to mentor me. Szathmáry and I met several times in Hungary on the occasions of his concerts and master courses. Several of these courses were

organized by me with the help of my colleagues and students.

II. Sources

During our meetings in Hungary and Freiburg, Zsigmond Szathmáry shared biographical documents, manuscripts, newspaper articles, sheet music, concert programs, and audio recordings with me that provided important, yet so far unpublished, details for this thesis.

I made notes about our professional conversations, he also agreed to meetings on three occasions where I would interview him on record specifically on the topics concerning the material of the dissertation. These interviews were conducted on 16 February 2019 in Budapest (4h4m), 18 August 2019 in Debrecen (1h21m) and 8–13 August 2021 in Freiburg when I was invited to spend time with him in his home and recorded 11 interview sessions (13h33m) with him.

Szathmáry's original music and transcripts, which were published mainly by Bärenreiter, Ricordi and Carus, were also used as source materials in addition to

recordings published by Hungaroton, Naxos, Wergo, Sony, Cybele, Zeitklang, RCA, ARE, BIS, Harmonia Mundi, and Signum.

The yearbooks of the Liszt Academy could have been significant sources however there was not a single yearbook published during Szathmáry's academic years (1959–1963) in Budapest. Despite this regrettable fact, publications from previous years have also provided important insights on organist and composer training.

The *Arcanum Digitheca* has proven to be a valuable source of information, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic when library research activities became almost impossible, as this digital database supplied me with articles, reports and concert reviews of music journals, art magazines, critical portals and written statements by Szathmáry's musician colleagues on him. A similar process was followed with related and relevant articles of German music magazines.

The aforementioned and only existing monograph written by Dominik Susteck has served as a secondary source. Additional sources include *György Ligeti: Music of the Imagination* by Richard Steinitz (published by

Editio Musica Budapest, 2013) and *Parlando - Rubato - Conversations, monologues and other diversions - a volume of conversations between Péter Eötvös and Pedro Amaral* (published by Rózsavölgyi).

Crucial details were provided by the following two academic papers by organist colleagues: *Relationship of notation and performance in the organ works of György Ligeti* by László Fassang (2016) and *Church and Theatre. Organ works of Mauricio Kagel* by Dóra Pétery (2018).

III. Methods

The processing of the academic literature and source materials, interview sessions with Zsigmond Szathmáry and the appraisal of the documents received from him all took place in parallel. The unique methodology and distinctive features of my dissertation could be attributed to the combination of historic pieces of information already published and available with the unprocessed ones, along with details from Szathmáry's personal

stories. Cross-referencing details obtained from different sources has sometimes been challenging, yet successful.

The structure of the dissertation, which gained its final form in the last phase, is the result of a lengthy process. I attempted to display the life and work of a diversified, multi-directional artist-teacher in a logical order resulting in the current structure based on his fields of activity.

Compiling the bibliography and discography in the appendix and registering the new works and recordings of his ever-growing oeuvre demanded a concentrated work ethic.

Having studied biographies of similar nature, I made a conscious effort to try and remain free of the biased subjectivity of a former mentee and present an objective description of Szathmáry's performer, composer, and teacher side – although these attempts may have sometimes been unsuccessful.

IV. Results

As can be read in the previous paragraphs, the choice of topic of this dissertation was inspired by the realisation that Zsigmond Szathmary is not only a significant organist and teacher of the past 60 years, but also a prominent figure of the European music scene due to his versatility and uniquely innovative performance style and compositional output. I have attempted to present this via my research and publish it in my dissertation.

The first chapter presents Szathmary’s motivation stemming from his family background, which later had major effects on his outlook on life. The second chapter is about his secondary and higher education studies in Hungary and also aims to provide a general overview of music education in the 1950s and ‘60s. This chapter also elaborates on the research of Szathmary’s academic studies in Austria and Germany and the influence of modern music on him. His studies in church music, his later work as a church musician, and the professional features of his gradually growing personal contacts in

Germany are hardly known among Hungarian professionals.

In the third chapter I present the extremely wide repertoire of Zsigmond Szathmáry, covering organ literature from the works of György Ligeti to early Baroque compositions, moving backwards in time. The fourth chapter presents the locations and content elements of Szathmáry's teaching activities, using the oral and written accounts of students.

A short chapter is about his work as a conductor, his collaboration with different ensembles and how he conducted his own pieces. Finally, I summarise my closing thoughts.

The appendix contains a list of Szathmáry's finished compositions up until the conclusion of the dissertation, a list of the contemporary works he presented or held in his repertoire, his artist discography, as well as photos of some of his prominent concert posters.

V. Documentation of professional activity related to the research topic

I applied to The Doctoral School of the Liszt Academy of Music with Zsigmond Szathmáry's *Strophen for organ and tape* (2001). Szathmáry's *B-A-C-H „Hommage a ...”* (2004) occupied me during my academic studies in Freiburg hence the work will be performed at my doctoral concert.

I have taught *Strophen* to many of my students, one of whom performed it at the 12th National High School Organ Competition on 23 March 2019, finishing second. Prior to the competition, this student performed the composition on several occasions.

I have kept the works I studied with Zsigmond Szathmáry in my repertoire and taught them with the aim to preserve and pass on the performing traditions of the compositions. Among these, I highlight the first performances of the following:

- Johann Sebastian Bach: Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein, BWV 641

Katholische Kirche Sankt St. Ulrich im Breisgau, 12
April 2004

- Johann Sebastian Bach: Fantasia and Fugue in G minor
BWV 542

14th International J. S. Bach Organ Competition,
Leipzig, 21 July 2004

- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Fantasia in F minor KV
608

Palace of Arts, Budapest, 18 April 2007

- Johann Sebastian Bach: Toccata and fugue in E major,
BWV 566

Hochschule für Musik Freiburg, Konzertsaal, 6 July
2007

- György Ligeti: Volumina

Hochschule für Musik Freiburg, Konzertsaal, 6 July
2007

- Max Reger: Halleluja! Gott zu loben bleibe meine
Seelenfreud – Chorale Fantasia

Final of the V. Hermann Schröder International Organ
Competition, Trier Cathedral, 20 September 2008

- Hermann Schröder: O heiligste Dreifaltigkeit –
Chorale Fantasia

Final of the V. Hermann Schröder International Organ
Competition, Trier Cathedral, 20 September 2008

The Filharmonia Hungary Non-profit organisation held the *Szathmáry 80* series of concerts, lectures and workshops on 19–20 August 2019. I presented a lecture about Szathmáry's work and the experiences of studying with him at the Reformed Small Church of Debrecen and at the Reformed Church of Hajdúböszörmény.