

Thesis of a Dissertation

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The Composer as Performer.  
On the body of work of Peter Eötvös as  
conductor

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## **I. Antecedents of the Research**

I have known Peter Eötvös and his work as a composer and conductor for over 20 years. During our common projects in the past decades I have not only studied conducting, composition and orchestration with him, but I've also had the opportunity to observe his personal compositional and conducting career closely. The time we have spent together in a workshop-like setting was proven useful in getting an inside look at his professional methods. I have learned a lot first hand about the beauty and the difficulties of a parallel creative and performing arts career.

## II. Sources

The primary and most direct source of my dissertation was Peter Eötvös himself. On September 9, 2017 I have conducted a string of interviews with him, about 90 minutes in total time, at his Budapest home. During my research I have relied on sources like the conversation book of Peter Eötvös and Pedro Amaral entitled *PARLANDO–RUBATO*, select issues of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, *The Hungarian Quarterly*, and *The New Hungarian Quarterly*. I have sampled articles and reviews from the Dutch *NRC Handelsblatt*, the *BBC Music Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and from online sources like *classicstoday.com*, *classicalsource.com*, *gramophone.co.uk*, and *La Folia*. The comprehensive list of concert programs conducted by Peter Eötvös between 1999 and 2019 was available via the website *eotvospeter.com*. I have analyzed the following hand-marked scores from Eötvös' personal archives: Karlheinz Stockhausen: *Punkte*, György Kurtág: *...quasi una fantasia...*, Béla Bartók: *Concerto for Orchestra*, Igor Stravinsky *Le sacre du printemps*. The hand-marked score

of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* was not available. The bar numbers and rehearsal marks for the pieces analyzed in details are based on the following editions: Béla Bartók *Concerto for Orchestra* Boosey and Hawkes, 1946, B.&H. 9009, Igor Stravinsky *The Rite of Spring (Le sacre du printemps)* Boosey and Hawkes, 1947, B.&H. 16333, Ludwig van Beethoven *Sinfonie Nr. 5, c-Moll, Op. 67* Editio Musica Budapest, edited by Gábor Darvas. The list of recordings used for comparative analysis is as follows: Béla Bartók: *Concerto for Orchestra* with the Cleveland Orchestra and the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester, both conducted by Peter Eötvös. Stravinsky *The Rite of Spring* recording with the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie, and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5* with Ensemble Modern, both published by the Budapest Music Center label. Bartók *Concerto* recordings conducted by Fritz Reiner and Pierre Boulez, and Stravinsky *Le sacre du printemps* recordings conducted by Igor Stravinsky, Robert Craft and Valery Gergiev.

### III. Method

Clear examples of how the creative thinking of a composer can influence the practice of conducting in the work of Peter Eötvös can be found in his recordings. I have decided to select recordings by Eötvös that can be easily compared to other available historic and stylistically mainstream ones. I was looking for the signs of how the musical approach of a composer-conductor from a Hungarian musical background can be different from other readings of the same work, in this case Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*. By comparing recordings of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps* I was looking for specific differences in phrasing, pacing, tempi and dynamics in the case of non-Hungarian musical idioms. At last by analyzing the Beethoven *Fifth Symphony* recording played by Ensemble Modern I wanted to discover the specifics of this unique and unusual experiment in the case of a major core-repertoire symphonic composition. During my research, due to the lack of available standards to compare to,

I avoided recordings of Eötvös' own compositions and of World Première recordings of new music. Because of the special characteristics of the genre I have also not examined recordings of operas and musical stage works.

## **IV. Results**

From details of Eötvös' career in conducting, from his programming practices and his score-preparing techniques I have come to the conclusion that his body of work as a conductor is one of a kind. Based on the analysis of his recordings I can state that his performing arts practice is of the highest international standards and he can be rightfully compared to the greatest conductors in the history of musical recordings. Eötvös is equally at home in Hungarian and non-Hungarian musical idioms and styles, and his historic knowledge of styles and genres are second to none. His Beethoven recording, based on my own analysis as well as on the international critical acclaim, is of the highest quality, yet his unique musical approach can only be fully understood in the context of his full body of work as an artist.

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

During the writing of my dissertation I have composed, conducted and recorded my newest orchestral piece entitled *Gloomy Sunday Variations*. The piece was dedicated to Peter Eötvös for his 75th Birthday, it was played by the Hungarian Radio Symphony Orchestra at a subscription concert, and was recorded by the same orchestra for the Archives of the Hungarian Radio. *Gloomy Sunday Variations* were played by the musicians of the Kodály Philharmony as well in the city of Debrecen, Hungary. I have conducted *Le sacre du printemps* twice with the Miskolc Symphony during the same period.