

# Theses

## I. History of the research

Robert Volkmann's name does not necessarily sound familiar even among musicians. I personally came across the composer's works when pianist Ilona Prunyi added a Volkmann piece to her program at her recital in Debrecen. Returning home after the concert I was wondering what kind of composer Volkmann was like and what is the reason for his works falling into obscurity. Two questions engaged me most: why did a composer of German origin live forty years in the nineteenth-century Hungary and how was it possible that he received the honorable position of the first music composition teacher of the Hungarian Royal Academy of Music?

With time, having more and more information at hand it was obvious for me that the oeuvre of Robert Volkmann has also been dealt with by several scholars and music historians, but still, regarding a more detailed knowledge of his Hungarian-related piano works and his relationship to Hungary there is still much to be explored.

Numerous books and papers have been written about Volkmann, one can find among them biographical works, summary studies, dissertations or even articles. Robert Volkmann's correspondence, which was compiled and published by Hans Volkmann, is an important document for the posterity. Among the most important writings on the composer one must first mention two biographical works by Hans Volkmann and the partly biographical, partly analytical English-language book by Andrew Glover. Also significant is the vast dissertation of the American music historian Thomas Michael Brawley, which gives a comprehensive picture of Volkmann's instrumental works. The 16-page study of Piroska D. Szemző is an indispensable resource among the works written in Hungarian and it approaches the composer's activities through his relationship to Heckenast.

Considering the above, and also, taking into account Ms. Anna Dalos' recommendations I finally decided to deal only with Volkmann's Hungarian-related piano works, a small but still highly important part of his oeuvre.

## II. Sources

In order to write the biographical parts, I took the primary material from Hans Volkmann's book about Robert Volkmann.

Since I took a closer look at the piano works of Hungarian aspect, Piroska D. Szemző's writing – among others – was an important source as she put great emphasis on studying Volkmann's Hungarian relationships. Gr. Géza Zichy's personal tone writing, the reminiscences of Jenő Hubay or critiques of Mosonyi and Ábrányi, which were published in

the „*Zenészeti Lapok*” all provided valuable information I could perfectly use in my present work.

Similarly, the composer’s peculiar introductory text to the Visegrád piano cycle proved to be useful.

With regard to the establishment of the Hungarian Academy of Music, I used a lot from Ferenc Liszt's correspondence and also from the regular and jubilee annuals of the Academy. I found information on this topic in Alan Walker’s book ‘*Franz Liszt. The Weimar years*’ too.

I read really interesting, sometimes touching words about Volkmann’s activities as a teacher in the memoirs of his pupils, Béla Szabados, Gr. Géza Zichy and Károly Aggházy, but the numerous documents in the yearbooks of the Academy were also useful as they contained concert posters, exam orders, lesson schedules or student registers from the initial period.

During the analysis I got help from the books of Klára Hamburger and Antal Molnár and also from Kristóf Csengery’s thesis.

In order to create the list of Hungarian piano works, Hans Scheffer's complete, systematically arranged list of compositions served as a basis.

### III. Methods

Since Volkmann's name rarely emerges in Hungarian music life and in the general knowledge, I considered it essential to outline a short biography in my dissertation. In this section I put great emphasis on studying the period he spent in Hungary and his Hungarian relationships. All of this was indispensable to understand the origin of his Hungarian piano pieces.

I performed the analyses using several approaches and viewpoints. On the one hand, I took into consideration the genre classification of the pieces and on the other hand, the styles and the impact of contemporary composers that can be felt most strongly in the pieces. I analyzed some compositions in their entirety, but for the cyclical works I preferred to illustrate their characteristics using examples taken from them. During my research to prepare the completion of this thesis I did not encounter any similar analyses, especially which would comparatively examine the Hungarian style marks.

Considering that Volkmann experimented with various genres found in the piano literature I found it important to take a closer look at all the pieces of the cycles containing Hungarian style piano works, despite the fact that I am not planning to mention all movements in my thesis. With my comparative analyses I was mainly trying to keep track of how the German and Hungarian national style marks mixed or separated in the works of one composer, Volkmann.

### IV. Results

In my dissertation I put an emphasis on Volkmann's Hungary-related piano works as I found it interesting to examine how a German-born composer was influenced by the Hungarian music culture – significantly different from his own.

Volkmann's Hungary-related works always contain at least references to Hungarian national culture or Hungarian historical events, even if the nature and structure of the works point more to the German romantic style. Such references to Hungarian style are the often listenable characteristic Hungarian- or 'Verbunkos'-style phrases. Certain works predominantly show these Hungarian style marks, such as the rhapsody-like '*Ungarische Lieder*' or the '*Au Tombeau de Comte Széchenyi*' which has the subtitle '*Fantasy*', but one can hear certain mix-up in most of his compositions. Nevertheless, the aspirations of the Saxony-born composer towards musical cosmopolitanism basically could not be realized. Volkmann remained as a sequel to the Beethoven and Mendelssohn lines and serves as a connecting link towards Brahms.

However, studying his works is not merely a matter of observing form or style. Being a teacher and performer I was interested in the technical challenges of the pieces and also in the difficulties related to their performance. After consulting Ms. Ilona Prunyi and Mr. István Kassai I was certain that Volkmann's compositions, seemingly perspicuous at first sight, are not at all simple technically.

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

On the occasion of the bicentenary of the birth of Robert Volkmann, I organized a recital in Debrecen, on 12 November 2015 at the Zoltán Kodály Music High School and AMI (secondary music school at that time) to acquaint his works with others.

At this concert, several of my colleagues participated to perform pieces of the composer, belonging to various genres. Due to the limited time frame of the concert, only excerpts of his larger works could be performed, but we still heard two movements from his string quartet in E minor (op. 14.), the *Romanze* for cello and piano (op. 7.), the complete cello concerto in A minor (op. 33.), the first movement of his trio in B flat minor (op. 5) and three solo piano pieces: *Nocturne* (op. 8.), the finishing piece '*At the tower of Salomon*' of the *Visegrád* series (op. 21.) and the *Cavatine und Barcarole* (op. 19.).

I was not only the organizer of that concert, but participated as a performer too. I played the *Cavatine und Barcarole* (op. 19.) – a piece close to me and chosen from Ilona Prunyi's CD – in solo, and I performed his trio in B flat minor (op. 5) together with my colleagues, which is a very kind and momentous piece for me too. I compiled the entire program of the concert since the composer was unknown for the other performers. The solemnity of the recital was raised by our librarian, Ildikó P. Stébel, who added a wealth of background information to the concert program.