

DLA doctoral dissertation

BY

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KURTÁG'S TROUSSOVA  
IN LIGHT OF RESEARCHING THE INTERPRETATION AND  
RECEPTION OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

The  
inseparable Unity of the Artist, the Piece, the Performers and the Receivers

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## I. Background of the research

The earliest preludes to my research – in retrospect to my two decades of orchestral career as a musician - are the questions risen in me in connection with contemporary music.

One cornerstone of this research is based on the attitudes towards the composer György Kurtág, the unreachability of the artist, the legends heard from his chosen disciples as well as from the group of performers who played his works. The other foundation stone is the concert experience of his master piece *Messages of the Late R. V. Troussova* in which I felt the perfect unity of poetry and music, of the dramatic nature of the Russian culture and the very special artistic attitude of György Kurtág.

The most important and exciting challenge during a performing artist's career is the ambition to interpret and perform the chosen piece according to a set of predefined criteria in the most perfect way. In my interpretation, the essence of performing a musical piece is to drag the audience out of their daily life and place them in another dimension in time where they can be part of the entity created by the impact of both the performer and the performed. The perfection of the performance lies in the fact that it cannot be startled out of 'this other world', each and every element of the performance that is harmonically joint serves to occupy the audience's perception and to place them into another dimension in time. In our age, the incredible new technologies make it possible to enjoy musical pieces in many different interpretations without leaving our home. Despite this fact, it is beyond dispute that all these technical developments cannot replace that magic milieu which is produced in the concert hall by the interaction of the audience, the performer and the piece itself. The piece which carries its composer's personality and message, the performer who knowing the intention of the composer and with deep knowledge of the piece itself contributes with her own style and interpretation and the audience that is able to receive the piece and with this inspiring energy it is also an active participant of the performance. My ambition to link these thoughts to the reception of contemporary music was also part of the preliminary steps to begin my research.

After leaving out many years of scholarly education I began to attend the doctoral courses of the Academy of Music where I was overcome by new and determining experiences. The classic topic which was the original objective of my studies – the study of Mozart and the theatrical use of wind instruments - was soon played down by my interest and curiosity about contemporary music. The more I understood about the realm of modern music, the

more I felt the urge as an artist to develop a considerably responsible attitude towards learning about, interpreting and performing these pieces. I also developed increased interests in connection with the works by György Kurtág. I felt, I could only answer the questions risen in me concerning his art if I got closer to him through his music, writings about him or discussions with people who know him. The more I learnt about Kurtág's world, the more I felt that this encounter changed my attitude to music and the world. I became his disciple without ever meeting him in the flesh. At the same time, the responsibility of making others meet this artistic oeuvre which is so difficult to reach but ever more valuable evolved in me. As a performing artist I felt it my mission to make the audience get closer to and understand Kurtág's art as well as contemporary music which is so difficult to receive. In my opinion, my personal experience and enlightenment which I discuss in my dissertation can supplement the sources available in this topic from another perspective, that is from the performing artist's. This research has reinforced my belief that we, performing artists – who inspire as artistic interpreters - take up a very important role with our humble and dedicated work to create the artistic experience. We are responsible to keep, enthuse and expand our audience both in keeping old traditions and propagating contemporary music.

## II. Sources

The objective of the performing artist is to create a relationship between the composer, the piece, herself and the audience. My primary sources were contemporary musical pieces which I listened to as well as performed in cooperation with the composers. I also had several discussions with artists, composers, performing artists and of course with the audience. In order to write the chapter dedicated to Kurtág I used such important sources as discussions and interviews with his friends, disciples and performers, writings about him, volumes of interviews with him and articles which I list in detail in the bibliography of my dissertation. To learn Russian and read Russian poetry and literary works also considerably helped me to understand the piece *Troussova*. Thus I could get closer and closer to the disassemble of the layers of my chosen theme. I used three records taken at different times, in different locations and by different artists for my detailed interpretational analysis of the piece. I wanted to observe and show whether there are differences on the piece's interpretation and whether these differences are considerable depending on the personal presence and direct influence of the artist.

### III. Methodology

My research methodology was to use the sources in as many ways as possible. It included listening to music, interpreting contemporary works, collecting and analysing interviews and related materials. I listened to all available records of *Messages of the Late R. V. Troussova* and compared them based on the different interpretations. My encounter with Kurtág's art and my research into his oeuvre made it clear for me that there is only one method of understanding life's matters: that it absorbing in details and digging ever deeper. Each response I got to my questions raised another question. I have followed this deep analysing method ever since.

### IV. Results

What I consider the most important result of my research is finding my way to contemporary music. Since my profession as a performing artist predestinates me to convey music as a creative medium, I can share my knowledge and experience in a direct way with the audience and my fellow-musicians. I am aware that my research is not the latest invention of mankind – but still hope that my dissertation explores important issues in an aspect not yet studied, that is from the perspective of a performing artist. I also hope that I both in direct and indirect ways serve the understanding and reception of music as a universal art.

The result of the chapter '*Kurtág's World*' is that it brings closer the world of one of the most extraordinary and inimitable geniuses of the Hungarian history of music to the audience, thus many things that are not acceptable or comprehensible in his art for people can be gradually reinterpreted and understood. The detailed survey through listening to the various records proves how important it is to know the Kurtág methodology, the so called interpretation concept as regards the performance of his pieces. The conclusions of the chapter about the interpretation of contemporary music are my discoveries that approaching music as an entity and spreading its reception for the general public can only be achieved by reforming primary music education and educating the audience widely. As a performing artist, who is in the closest and most direct connection with the receiving audience, I have to be aware of this kind of responsibility.

## V. Documentation

The documentation necessary for my dissertation consists of a list of contemporary works which I performed as a member of the Pannon Philharmonic Orchestra:

Arnold Schönberg: Egy varsói menekült 11 December 2003. PTE Romhányi Aula.Pécs. cond.: Hamar Zsolt

Ligeti György: Lontano 13 December 2006. PTE Romhányi Aula Pécs,  
cond.: Hamar Zsolt

Leos Janacek: Taras Bulba 2 February 2007. Művészetek Palotája. Budapest.  
cond.: Martin Turnovsky

Luciano Berio: Rendering – Schubert vázlatai nyomán 27 September 2007. PTE Romhányi Aula. Pécs. cond.: Hamar Zsolt

Horváth Balázs: Visszatekintve I., II. 15 March 2008. Művészetek Palotája. Budapest.  
cond.: Hamar Zsolt.

Sándor László: A Valóságos Szentháromság dicsérete, a lángoló Március és a tavasz ébredése 15 March 2008 Művészetek Palotája. Budapest. cond.: Hamar Zsolt

Zombola Péter: Ünnepi nyitány 15 March 2008. Művészetek Palotája. Budapest.  
cond.: Hamar Zsolt

Vidovszky László: Kilenc Kurtág-köszöntő korál kiszenekarra.  
21 September 2008. Művészetek Palotája. Budapest. cond.: Hamar Zsolt

Robert Ward: A salemi boszorkányok – opera performance 9-10 November 2008.  
Mezzo Operafesztivál Szeged cond.: Pacien Mazzagatti

Heinrich Marschner: Vampyr 15 November 2008. Mezzo Operafesztivál. Szeged.  
cond.: Olari Elts

Davor Bobić: IZAJÁS Passió 18 April 2009. Pécsi Bazilika.  
cond.: Hamar Zsolt

Szóllósy András: 3. concerto 14 May 2009. Pécsi Nemzeti Színház .  
cond.: Hamar Zsolt

Steve Reich: Variations for Winds, Strings & Keyboards (Hungarian Premiere)  
10 December 2009. PTE Romhányi Aula. Pécs. cond.: Rácz Zoltán

Fazil Say: III. zongoraverseny (Anatolia csendje) 14 May 2010. Művészetek Palotája, Budapest. cond.: Peskó Zoltán.

Krzysztof Penderecki: II. Karácsonyi szimfónia 8 April 2011. Művészetek Palotája, Budapest. cond.: Krzysztof Penderecki

Kurtág György: ...quasi una fantasia... 20 May 2011. Művészetek Palotája, Budapest cond.: Vass András

Ligeti György: Le Grand Macabre 22 May 2013. Művészetek Palotája, Budapest cond.: Vajda Gergely