As a PhD-student in musicology at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music, I spent nine months in Tallahassee at Florida State University. The project of my Fulbright-grant was to study Ernő Dohnányi’s American period. For certain political and musical reasons, Dohnányi’s works have been long neglected by the Hungarian musical establishment. Recently, however, there has been a growing interest in his œuvre by American and Hungarian musicians and musicologists. In addition to the research connected to my PhD-dissertation, my main project was to process sources from the Dohnányi-house. This work was a cooperation of the FSU, the Dohnányi Archives of Budapest, and Dr. Scán Ernst McGlynn, Dohnányi’s grandson and legal successor. The most important result of my stay was that as a symbol linking the American and Hungarian branches of Dohnányi-scholarship, Dr. McGlynn sent to Hungary with me 500 original Dohnányi-documents of great value and gave them on long-term loan to the Dohnányi Archives in Budapest.
1. Introduction:

Ernő Dohnányi and the problems of the Dohnányi-reception

“Florida’s youthful oldster […], last of the great Romantic Age masters […] shows no signs of slowing down. He gestures frequently with hands like sculpted marble combining the restless energy of a college student with the quiet wisdom of 81 years devoted to composing, conducting and teaching music” 1 – wrote an American music reviewer in 1958, in an absolutely admiring and appreciative tone generated by the old Dohnányi’s unlikely vigour. This remark was not unique for how the composer was received during his last period: the old maestro’s dynamism was praised with the most variegated and witty words by the American reviewers. “Dohnányi met all demands with confidence and composure, with a technical equipment practically equal to a 20-year-old’s” 2 – wrote one critic. Someone else wrote: [Dohnányi is] “able not only to move about the stage with the fluttering vivacity of a young sparrow, but play with all the vigor and spirit of a keyboard artist beginning a career.” 3 Others described the phenomenon as follows: “he threw aside his 76 years like an old cloak,” 4 or: “Ernst von Dohnanyi turned a trick that few composers can do – sit down to a piece of music as an old man and finish years younger.” 5 The admiration was not unjust: Dohnányi’s American period was very active in several aspects, although the composer was already 72 years old when he settled down in Tallahassee, in 1949. Until his death in 1960, he was a busy and popular Professor of Piano and Composition at the Florida State University Music School. He also visited other universities as a guest professor and lecturer (e.g. Ohio University and Kansas University). Additionally, he appeared on the concert stage more than 120 times during this decade. He gave concerts as a pianist, chamber musician, and conductor, too, mainly in smaller university towns. He also had time to compose: nine pieces with opus number, and several minor compositions (without opus number, revisions, and unfinished works) were born in his workshop. 6

Ernő Dohnányi (1877–1960) was one of the most important personalities in Hungarian music history in the 20th century. After his childhood in Pozsony (now Bratislava, Slovakia), he became a student at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, majoring in piano and

Atlantic City Press (April 10, 1953).
6 His major American works are: Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (op. 43, 1949–1950); Three Singular Pieces for Piano (op. 44, 1951); Concertino for Harp and Orchestra (op. 45, 1952); Stabat Mater (op. 46, 1952–1953); American Rhapsody (op. 47, 1953); Aria and Passacaglia for Flute (op. 48/1&2, 1958–1959); revisions of Symphony in E major (op. 40, 1953–1956); Twelve Short Studies for the Advanced Pianist (1950); Daily Finger Exercises for the Advanced Pianist (1959–1960).
Ernő Dohnányi in Tallahassee

He was the first pupil of the institution who later became a world-famous musician; his career as a piano virtuoso started in 1897. In his younger years, he lived in Vienna, and then moved to Berlin as professor at the Königliche Musikhochschule. During World War I, he came back to Budapest, the city that always served as a base for him, until his emigration in 1944. Beyond his career as a composer, pianist–dirigent, and professor, what made him the most prominent figure in Hungarian music was that he obtained the three leading positions in the 1930s. He was elected musical director of the Budapest Philharmonic Society Orchestra in 1919, then he became director of the Music Division of the Hungarian Radio in 1931, and he served as director of the Academy of Music in 1934.

Holding leading musical positions not only meant power and exceptional authority for him, this later became the most problematic motif of his life. In spite of his several oppositions with the far right-wing political forces, his person and his activities became the target of accusations both in musical and political respects. In 1945, his name was published on a non-official list of war criminals. Although he was never charged officially, the accusations spread quickly in the musical world, obstructing his post-war concert tours in Europe and creating difficulties for his success in the United States, too (mostly in the North Atlantic cities). Similarly to other composers who emigrated, Dohnányi’s compositions were seldom played for decades in communist Hungary.

He was also criticized in musical – aesthetic and music-political – aspects. He was accused of hindering Bartók, Kodály, and younger, modern composers. His “conservative” compositional style and aesthetic view seemed to be also problematic for his contemporaries and for posterity, as well. Dohnányi’s style developed under the influence of late German romanticism. He was not interested in folk music, nor did he have other modern musical ambitions (dodecaphony, serialism); his works were isolated from the different musical trends of the first half of the 20th century.

As a consequence, in the first three or four decades following Dohnányi’s death, only one monograph was published (written by a slightly prejudiced Dohnányi-pupil) and – sporadically – some studies were published, as well; so his oeuvre was almost completely neglected by musicians and musicologists. Nevertheless, Dohnányi-scholarship has come through an explosion-like development recently, due to the political changes in Hungary and the paradigm shifts in musicology. After the 25-year-long silence following the publication of Vázsonyi’s book, the

renewed scholarly interest in Dohnányi brought along with it the beginnings of systematic research into his work. Moreover, this research started almost at the same time in Hungary and the United States, so the two branches could inspire each other. The most important result of the international Dohnányi-scholarship was the foundation of the Dohnányi Archives in Budapest by the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture.

As a PhD-student in musicology and a Fulbright-grantee, I wanted to study Dohnányi’s American period and process its sources. Because of the circumstances detailed above, my project not only served my personal purposes, but the global purposes of the international Dohnányi-scholarship, too.

2. Description of my research fields

My work during the nine-month-long stay in the US was divided into three areas. The first and most obvious goal of my stay was to study the musical and non-musical sources in the Dohnányi and Kilényi–Dohnányi Collections of the Florida State University’s Warren D. Allen Music Library for my dissertation. The FSU Dohnányi-collection, the documents of which were originally collected from the composer’s university room and Tallahassee home (Tallahassee, Beverly Court 568), has been growing since the composer’s death. With the assistance of Dohnányi’s third wife, Ilona Zachár, as well as his step-grandson and legal successor, Dr. Seán Ernst McGlynn, hundreds of musical sources, letters, documents, printed scores, books, scrapbooks and recordings were given to the university library. In 2002, sources of extraordinary value were also placed at the FSU; these were found in the home of Dohnányi’s student, friend, and colleague,


Edward Kilényi.\textsuperscript{11, 12} At this time, almost all the Tallahassee sources are accessible and can be studied at the Florida State University.

The second part of my task was to catalogue and arrange the remaining sources in the Dohnányi-house. This project was a common initiative of the Dohnányi Archives, the FSU, and Dr. McGlynn. Though a lot of documents had been taken out from the Dohnányi-house before my arrival, there were still many very important records: letters (to and from the Dohnányis), Dohnányi’s lecture-sketches, hand-written dictionaries, calendars, official documents, ID documents, photos, and personal items. Dr. McGlynn and I decided to divide the catalogued materials into three parts. A small portion of these remained in the house (personal books and objects, a few documents of little value, and photos to be restored). About 800 letters and documents, connecting closely to the American period – and mostly written in English – were deposited at the FSU. The remaining 500 documents, connecting to earlier periods and/or written in Hungarian, were sent back with me to Hungary and given to the Dohnányi Archives as a long-term loan by Dr. McGlynn.

The third area of my activity also belonged to the University. Although I was a visiting researcher at the FSU, the professors of musicology let me attend some classes, so I had the opportunity to experience American musical and musicological university training. Within this context, I gave some short lectures on different topics in Hungarian music history (not only on Dohnányi’s works, but on the musical life of Hungary in the 1950s, the Bartók-reception in Hungary, and Bartók’s musical prosody). My lectures interested the FSU students and professors, and they greatly enhanced my professional discussions with them.

Since I found my American researches successful and since I had the opportunity to collect personal experiences about the circumstances of the special last scene of Dohnányi’s life, I decided to change the topic of my dissertation, and write about the composer’s American years (at the beginning of my Fulbright-year, my plan was to write about a much wider topic, Dohnányi’s variation strategies in his instrumental works). Dohnányi’s life, activity, and musical works in the period from 1949 to 1960 seem to me an area remarkably worth studying, for many reasons. First of all, its source-material was preserved in one unit, and I had the opportunity to study it thoroughly, thanks to my Fulbright-grant. Secondly, in my view, Dohnányi’s American compositions represent a very interesting and multi-colored slice of his œuvre (regarding their genre, apparatus, style, and inspirational background), which makes this period very exciting for a musicologist. Thirdly, although the American period is special in


\textsuperscript{12} FSU, Dohnányi Collection: “Letters and Documents from Dr. Seán Ernst McGlynn catalogued by Veronika Kusz 2005/2006.”
many respects, I think that it can answer several questions about Dohnányi, which may remain hidden by studying only his earlier years. During these years, the composer had to get along in completely unusual surroundings and with a very different status: in an American small town, and not as a powerful leader or a world-famous and popular musician, but as a subordinate at a university and a pianist with restricted possibilities for performing concerts. His life was determined at the same time by the difficulties of his fight with the political accusations against him and by the need to adapt to his new environment, by necessity establishing a new existence. These factors contributed to a difficult situation and probably affected his compositional works, too. In my dissertation, I would like to give a thorough and objective survey of his American activities, and look for answers to such questions as: what does “American period” mean in Dohnányi’s oeuvre?; in what respect are his American compositions characterized by the compliance with his new situation, or how do they fit with his earlier style?; how did the hardships affect his creative work?; how did his financial–existential defenselessness determine his activities and how did his American years influence his posthumous reception?

3. Importance of musical sources

The Dohnányi Collection at FSU has many different musical sources: autographs (sketches, drafts, and fair copies) and printed scores of Dohnányi’s and other composers’ works. These sources can answer many different questions for scholars. For example, the draft of his unfinished Requiem suggests that Dohnányi was deeply interested in religious genres in his last period (in contrast with his earlier years); his printed scores show us what kind of compositions were important for him in these years; the lecture-sketches reveal his formal conception of Beethoven’s piano sonatas; the revisions of his Symphony in E major tell us about his compositional method and thinking, etc.13

One of the most interesting pieces of the collection (in the “Kilényi–Dohnányi” part) is the unit of sketches, drafts and fair copies of the Passacaglia for Solo Flute, op. 48/2 (see facsimile).14 The piece, which is the ultimate opus of the oeuvre, draws attention to itself in many respects. Firstly, it is quite unusual because of the choice of instrument, which is unprecedented in the oeuvre. (The choice had biographical reasons: Dohnányi made the acquaintance of the Ohio University

13 About the revisions of his Symphony in E see: James A. Grymes, “Compositional Process in Dohnányi’s Symphony in E Major, op. 40,” in Grymes (ed.), Perspectives on Ernst von Dohnányi, 139–164.
14 The illustrations are published here with the kind permission of Dr. McGlynn and the FSU Warren D. Allen Music Library (photo) and the FSU Warren D. Allen Music Library (facsimile).
President John Baker’s family in 1949, and they became good friends. One of Baker’s daughters, Ellie, was a flute-player – her playing and personality was the inspiration for Dohnányi’s last pieces for flute.) Secondly, its style is also curious: in spite of Dohnányi’s “conservative” attitude, the first half of the passacaglia-theme forms a dodecaphonic row (Reihe). Though the entire piece is not dodecaphonic, the passacaglia-structure (repeating, closed sections) and the other twelve-tone sections of the piece have a curious, atonal, modern, not Dohnányi-like sound and character to them. On the other hand, the piece is closed by a definitely tonal code section, which makes the atonal antecedents irrational and odd. Its significant source-material is also quite exceptional (since only a few musical sources remained from Dohnányi), but its existence not only increases the mysteriousness of the piece, but helps to answer some questions, as well. First of all, it suggests a struggling compositional process. During the compositional process, the composer seemed to be dissatisfied for a long time with connecting the variations, and he had difficulties in making the piece a continuous progress. He also had problems with the creation of the large-scale form: the order of the variations seems to be almost accidental, and the form is inconsistent and static. On the other hand, although the composition is built of eight-measure-long units until the recapitulation, this has nothing to do with dodecaphony, first because the passacaglia notes are even left out of some variations, so they are not of basic importance, and secondly because Dohnányi obviously found pleasure in establishing different tonal variants (it is clear from the source material that he also sketched the harmonization of the theme). Because of these and other aspects, it seems that Dohnányi was experimenting, but the test was not really successful. It is a question, however, whether the composition was really intended to be “successful” in this sense, or if Dohnányi let his musical thoughts abandon the atonal theme for a more familiar style, suggesting that dodecaphony was not an option in his viewpoint, at least, not for him. The basic element of the composition, the obvious and conscious gag that Dohnányi ends a twelve-tone, serious passacaglia with a tonal and immoderate coda, should definitely not be contested. But it might be complemented by the observation that maybe he did not consider the more up-to-date compositional techniques only with negligence, and that his worries about the reception of his œuvre after his death left their mark on his way of thinking. So, according to the source material (and other musical characteristics) of the piece, it seems that, beyond the fact that the Passacaglia for Flute is an obvious flip against the modern music, it also shows – consciously or not – the old composer’s struggles.15

15 This is a summary of my study on the Passacaglia, see: “Pure music? Dohnányi’s Passacaglia for Flute (op. 48, nos. 2).” Studia Musicologica 48 /1–2 (2007), 79–99.
4. Importance of non-musical sources

Letters can also provide additional material to answer certain questions in connection with Dohnányi’s last period. In the following, it is demonstrated by some selected passages how our knowledge about a creative life-period can be enriched with personal and official letters.

The Dohnányis’ settlement in the US was not without difficulties in financial, political and existential respects, as well. Ilona von Dohnányi’s touching letter to violinist Endre Zathureczky, who was considering emigrating from Hungary after the revolution in 1956, is a document expressing the personal tone of their struggles: “God is my witness, I really would like to give you good advice, but who sees the future, who knows what’s best? I can say one thing with complete certainty: don’t get excited, try to stay completely calm. Starting a new life needs a lot of moral strength […] You will need every single bit of your nervous system to build up a new existence. Regarding the question, whether you would go back to Hungary, even the day before yesterday, I would have hesitated to advise you anything, because I don’t know how you can take root in a strange country, and how much you appreciate things you had at home. When we got away from Hungary, we didn’t have another choice […] But the first years were horrible, the persecution here, etc. But now, I can say, we are satisfied and happy. We are not rich […], but we have a home that we love, we have friends, Americans, who took us into their heart, and who are faithful to us.

We love our new homeland.¹⁶

Dohnányi’s American net of relationships can also be mapped by his correspondence. It seems that he felt it important to be in touch with his family in Hungary; with Hungarian emigrants; with Americans whom he already knew in Hungary; and with his university colleagues. A significant amount of the correspondence is letters from his students, who wrote diligently to their FSU professor after leaving Tallahassee. They discussed different musical and personal problems with Dohnányi, and they reported on their lives and on their professional problems. They often asked questions (e.g. regarding their concert programs, or literature about a paper), and they wrote about concert experiences. The topics of the letters point to Dohnányi’s thoughts and musical ideas, as well. A student of his, for example,

Ernő Dohnányi in Tallahassee

asked his advice for the compilation of her concert program, and her question refers – indirectly – to the consciousness of Dohnányi’s own program-concept, and to his interest in the variation form and strategies. She wrote the following: “I have been asked to serve on a panel for the East Central Division of the Music Teachers National Association convention in February. [...] I am going to play three variation pieces, all built on the same variation principle – The King’s Hunt by Bull (which I did on the seminar), La Campanella, and one of Barber Excursions. Of course, I expect to do a little speaking along with the playing. What do you think of that?”

One can learn a lot about Dohnányi’s reputation and popularity from his students’ letters. Janet Sitges’ farewell letter is a good summary of their gratitude and warm feelings: “I shall enjoy my year here – but I can hardly explain my feelings about leaving you. To say the very least, it is upsetting. My two years of study have been heaven for me – but you already know that, I am sure. You couldn’t help but have felt that all this time. I can scarcely use so weak a term as »thank you«... it doesn’t nearly express my real appreciation.”

Not only were his students passionately fond of him, he received many letters from people unknown to him. They asked different questions about music and pianism; or they asked for his signature and photo; or they simply assured him about their appreciation.

In some exceptional cases, Dohnányi himself confessed his musical ideas in his letters, too. He did not like to speak or write about his works or his aesthetics. His opinion about the younger generation of composers, expressed in his letter to FSU Dean Karl Kuersteiner, while discussing the conditions of his position at the university in August of 1949, is a very valuable document. Dohnányi wrote: “There are nowadays very-very few composers in the whole world who should be allowed to compose. [...] Now I don’t mind »modernity« if the composer knows his »business«, but generally he knows nothing, generally he hardly can harmonize decently a simple melody not to speak of his inability to solve the easiest task of counterpoint. Here most probably I shall want an assistant teacher; at least my demand will be, that the student is well acquainted with the rules of harmony and the elements of counterpoint.”

He rarely wrote about his feelings about his compositions. Because of this kind of timidity, his letter to Ellie Baker about the Passacaglia for Flute is exceptional, and affirms our interpretation, detailed above, that this short and odd piece is not only a joke, but also expresses deep feelings. He wrote: “I must confess that I love that Passacaglia very much and I would have been disappointed if you would not like or would have found it impossible to play. And that you get fond of it the more you play, it gives me still more satisfaction.”

5. McGlynn-documents to Budapest

As I mentioned above, at the end of my American year, more than 500 original Dohnányi-documents from Dohnányi’s house were sent to Budapest with me by Dohnányi’s step-grandson and legal successor, Dr. Seán Ernst McGlynn. The group of documents, which is now catalogued and ready for scholarly use in the Dohnányi Archives, consists of eight parts: 1) Dohnányi’s letters (1939–1959; 54 items); 2) Ilona von Dohnányi’s letters (1941–1948; 31 items); 3) Mátyás Dohnányi’s (composer’s son) letters (1942–1944; 17 items); 4) letters from Dohnányi’s sister (1949–1959; 175 items) and documents sent by her (1889–1959; 56 items); 5) letters from Ilona von Dohnányi’s parents (1954–1959; 81 items); 6) Dohnányi’s calendars (1938–1959; 21 items); 7) the Dohnányis’ IDs, passports (1936–1950; 11); 8) a scrapbook (1945–1946; 31 items); 9) photos (1946–1960; 36 items). All the documents are of extreme value; their publication and a study about their importance are in progress.

What I consider the most important result of my American research is not what I accomplished, but the noble gesture by Dr. McGlynn to give these sources to the Hungarian Dohnányi Archives. This event is very significant for the Dohnányi-scholarship in at least three respects. Firstly, the material is mostly connected to Hungary and written in Hungarian, so Hungarian scholars can use it better and more effectively. Secondly, the collection of the Dohnányi Archives in Budapest has relatively few original documents, so the value of the collection was remarkably increased by the McGlynn-sources. Finally, Dr. McGlynn’s gesture can be regarded as a symbolic one, linking American and Hungarian Dohnányi-research. It not only strengthens Hungarian scholars’ relationship with Dohnányi’s successors in Tallahassee, but it is an assurance of the future cooperation of musicologists and librarians from the two countries. I also consider it to be the most important result of my project, because helping the mutual understanding between Hungary and the US is the final goal of a Hungarian Fulbrighter.