

# The Mechanics of Culture: New Music in Hungary Since The System Change

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## Introduction

This a paper aims to measure the pulse of Hungary's new-music life in 2006, and in particular to assess the impact of the change from a communist to a free-market system upon the composition field. It presents an overview of a multi-layered and complex subject. The delicateness and, at times, thorniness of the period prior to 1990 makes truth and clarity elusive, and the musical life of the period since 1990 has hardly been touched upon in writing. The chosen strategy is to eschew artistic assessments and detailed musical discussion, and to focus upon the infrastructure of the composition field in nine separate but interconnected areas, including an assessment of how changes in the structure of the country and the field may have impacted new music up to the present moment.

Research comprised interviews with Hungarian composers, analysis of their music,

consultation with musicologists and music historians who specialize in recent Hungarian music, and a review of the available written sources. For the composer interviews, a fixed set of twenty questions served as a “litmus test” and entry point into key issues. The interviewees, roughly forty in number, represent a cross-section of the field from novices born in the late 1980s up through established composers in their 60s and 70s. They were overwhelmingly male; only two women composers participated in the study. Interviews were conducted over email in the instances where personal meetings were impossible. Certain composers chose to elaborate significantly upon the given questions to shed light upon the intricacies of the field. Music historians and critics Péter Halász and Zoltán Farkas, Fellows at the Music Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, provided a larger critical context for the composers’ comments, filled in the historical “cracks,” and offered an overview of the relevant literature. The generation born in the 1930s is well documented in books by such authors as Imre Földes, László Dobzsay, and György Kroó, but these sources tend to stop at the late 1970s or early 1980s. Besides the series of booklets on individual composers published by Mágus and various reviews in Hungarian music periodicals, writings on Hungarian music from the last 25 years are few. The music is touched upon in this paper’s final two sections, but a substantive account thereof is left for a future monograph.

## From State Support to a Free-Market System

The dissolution of Soviet occupation and the move to a democratic system and a free-market economy brought significant changes in both amount and type of government support to composers. Under communism, a core group of 30 to 40 received support from the state in the form of publishing, recording, performances, and commissioning. This support was blind both to the demands of the market and to the popularity of the music. In 1990 the possibility of applying for state grants opened up to a broader range of composers. One might surmise that the funds formerly disbursed by the state should then have poured into a new infrastructure that the artists would develop for their allocation. In certain senses this somewhat naïve model is accurate, but adhering to it, one finds that in reality much of the money evaporated.

Sixteen years later, a look through the Budapest concert calendar reveals twenty or so concerts per month funded, at least partially, by national or local state cultural funds. In the case of the National Cultural Fund, it is the “rate” of support that has changed.<sup>1</sup> But the disbursement of the funds also differs considerably, since their allocation is now subject to the determining powers of a democratic system. Many composers complain that the support that formerly went to new concert music has been redirected to “könnyű zene” – light or pop music.

1 Zoltán Farkas. Interview. 30 March 2006.

“Now the audience can turn to another direction,” says composer Béla Faragó. “They needed contemporary music less after 1989. There is more pop music, more radio and TV channels now – an easier way for the masses to meet with music. There are some grants [available to composers], but there are no cultural programs against this phenomenon.”<sup>2</sup>

The opposition between support for serious music and pop music, says Péter Halász, is not as great as some composers represent it. He cites a specific controversy in 2005 when a government minister claimed that Hungarian pop music is part of the national culture, and therefore should be supported. “The original idea was to support these kinds of [pop] groups actively. But instead of the small groups in the cultural centers in the country, groups already in the business got the support.” He describes the premise of supporting pop music as encouraging “active music-making,” in such a way as to engage a broader spectrum of people, since “not everyone will sing in a choir like Kodály wanted.”<sup>3</sup>

With the change to a free-market economy came two other important changes: Private support became viable, and Hungary entered the world market. But private patrons or groups who support the arts are “almost unheard of” in Hungary, in contrast with Western countries with strong capitalist traditions and bases of private support, in addition to both national and regional

government support.<sup>4</sup> Certain composers cited “three different private firms” to which they generally turn for support. But Miklós Malek, a composer familiar with commercial-music side of the field, reports that “the market here is like a little neighborhood compared to America.” Foreigners have to some extent entered Hungary’s market, but Malek characterizes it as a “tiny corner” of the world market.<sup>5</sup>

In an era when the health of contemporary music culture is in question in many areas of the world, fifteen years may be insufficient for Hungarian government support to evolve advantageously and for private patronage and participation in the world market to gain footholds. Composers have had to master a whole new set of skills unheard of to them before 1990. The consensus that emerges is of a less adept handling of the system change on the part of composers than by other types of artists. Halász says that the changes in infrastructure had a “catastrophic effect” upon composers, “especially when you look at writers, artists, and the other branches of culture.” In other branches, they “organized themselves much better after the changeover of the regime than the composers.”<sup>6</sup> The composers agree: “Painters and visual artists made a system for promoting themselves, but composers don’t like making business. In every country, there is no business in

4 Ibid.

5 Miklós Malek. Interview. 24 March 2006.

6 Péter Halász. Interview. 30 March 2006.

contemporary music.”<sup>7</sup> “The generation that was in charge during the changeover wasn’t capable of handling it because they didn’t grow up with it.”<sup>8</sup>

## Censorship

The impact of censorship on composers before the system change, and its residual effects afterwards, are by nature enigmatic. Composer István Szigeti gives the example of “three Ts” that represent the continuum of government response to artists under communism – “tiltott, támogatott, túrt (prohibited, supported, tolerated).<sup>9</sup> Censorship in Hungary evolved considerably from the late 1950s through the 1980s. “There was a slow overall loosening of control, with some politically well-defined points – such as the early 1970s – when this control became stronger again. These changes arose in the context of Hungarian politics and world politics.”<sup>10</sup> One example of a significant change is the appointment of István Láng, an “avante-garde” composer, to the leadership of the communist Music Society in 1979.<sup>11</sup>

“Official” composers did not speak out against the state, and sometimes celebrated communist ideals in works such as the “tömegdal” or songs on “propaganda” texts that agitated for work and

socialism.<sup>12</sup> Anyone perceived as a threat was subject to censorship; new-sounding or “avante-garde” music might be perceived as an ideological attack upon the system. Thus the progressive music of the New Music Studio<sup>13</sup> was perceived to have political or ideological implications. Although music is a “hedonistic” art, dissidence in textless music was difficult for the regime to define. The members of the New Music Studio were allowed to do their work – according to Jeney, censorship did not influence his thought processes when he wrote music<sup>14</sup> – but the state wanted to monitor and control their activities. They were compelled to join the Communist Youth League in order to graduate successfully from the Music Academy.<sup>15</sup> Their music was published and released much later than that of some of their contemporaries.<sup>16</sup> The bizarre fact remains that, through a personal contact with the conductor Albert Simon, the New Music Studio was part of the Communist Youth Organization (KISZ), which provided them with rehearsal and concert space.

Non-musical activities could naturally impact a musician’s status with the censors. Active, vocal opponents of the regime could hardly get any work at all, while less serious activities could get

one blacklisted, as in the case of Jeney’s signing of a proclamation in support of Va lav Havel in 1979. The blacklisting of artists and intellectuals meant that many only got top-ranking university jobs in 1990 (some taught in their field but on a lower level, such as composition classes for musicologists).<sup>17</sup> Direct contact with students was considered by the regime to be threatening. That Jeney could be a card-carrying member of the “New Music Studio of the Association of Communist Youth,” and also be blacklisted through the 1980s, is a most apt paradox of the era.

A phenomenon of “reverse censorship” can be observed post-1990: One composer of music for animated films said that his life and career fell apart after 1989 “because the Hungarian animated film industry fell apart,” and also because “my father was a communist, and so I was labeled a “bad person.”<sup>18</sup> As regards censorship under the regime, the image of someone sitting in a room with a score trying to determine its subversiveness is not altogether inaccurate. But the state could only reach so far into the musical realm. An anecdote from the late 1970s describes a member of the musicians’ union visiting the ministry of culture with a tape recorder. He plays an excerpt of a piece from the New Music Studio – Jeney or Sárosi – saying, “You see, one cannot tell that it is music. You must prohibit it.” The communist minister replies, “That is a problem among musicians – I cannot help. You must solve it yourselves.”<sup>19</sup>

## Politics, Music, and Musical Politics

In the political realm, the post-1990 period is considerably more unstable and changeable than the preceding one. Many composers report “something unspoken” – political affiliations that are not talked about, but of which all are aware. Composers cited a sense that “if one political party is in, their friends get the opportunities”<sup>20</sup> and that the change in leadership every four years leads to “financial instability.”<sup>21</sup> At the same time, out of those interviewed who answered the question, only 23 per cent say that politics have an impact on their work and career (77 per cent say that politics have no impact). Most are reticent to get involved directly with politics, and express a desire to remain aloof. Few believe that anything would change with the current (2006) elections. Their music is rarely directly inspired by politics.<sup>22</sup>

In a small country like Hungary, where those active in a given field generally know one another, inter-personal connections are crucial. But integration of national politics with those of the music field has apparently declined since 1990. Politicians are not integrated into the “personal network” anymore for two

7 Béla Faragó. Interview. 26 March 2006.

8 Tamás Beischer-Matyó. Interview. 24 March 2006.

9 Istvan Szigeti. Interview. 24 March 2006. Szigeti adds that the prohibited art was generally pop or multimedia.

10 Péter Halász. Interview. 31 March 2006.

11 Zoltán Jeney. Interview. 6 April 2006.

12 Ibid.

13 The members of the New Music Studio included Zoltán Jeney, László Vidovszky, Zsolt Serei, László Sárosi, Gyula Csapó, László Tihány, and Barnabas Dukai, who joined their ranks slightly later.

14 Zoltán Jeney. Interview. 6 April 2006.

15 Ibid.

16 Péter Halász. Interview. 30 March 2006.

17 Zoltán Jeney. Interview. 6 April 2006.

18 Zsolt Pethő. Interview. 23 March 2006.

19 Péter Halász. Interview. 30 March 2006.

20 Zsolt Pethő. Interview. 23 March 2006.

21 Antál Babits. Interview. 26 March 2006.

22 One exception given by Jeney is the nationalist, “mystical” rock opera by Levente Szörényi, *The People of Arpád*, although a look at publicity for the opera reveals no direct sponsorship from -- or connection to -- a political party. Jeney also cites a general difference in comportment between artists who support the “left” and the “right.” Zoltán Jeney. Interview. 9 March 2006.

reasons: they don't stay in power for 10 or 15 years as before, and they are not as interested in music. "The earlier regime needed some representative qualities of culture" to sustain it.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, since "everybody is now his or her own manager,"<sup>24</sup> politics within the field have grown even more important. Composers comment that "inter-personal connections have much to do with one's position in musical life," but that competition between them is not intense: it is "like a frozen lake;"<sup>25</sup> that the field is divided into layers, with "a lot of fighting among composers"<sup>26</sup>; that "composers don't listen to each other – everyone is into themselves," and that "an aristocrat-class controls everything."<sup>27</sup> Action on the part of composers to remedy these problems includes a musical forum called "Kortársakról Kortársaknak" (From Contemporaries to Contemporaries), recently organized through the Artisjus organization. Designed to nurture a dialogue, it presents lectures by guest composers who take questions from an audience of both composers and a lay public.

## Key Organizations

Artisjus was formed in 1989 to distribute royalty income among Hungary's composers. They worked out a system entirely new to Hungary, despite some parallels with American performing rights organizations. According to its chair, Máté Hollós, it has evolved into "a genuine society defending composers' rights, thanks to which the members (and publishers) can count on more democratic decision-making in this institution of cardinal importance for them."<sup>28</sup>

A system of points is employed to allocate annual royalty income, which is relatively low. Each composer possesses a certain number of points; top ranking composers, who have won the Kossúth prize, have the maximum 80 points. A small committee of five composers – three from classical and two from pop music – assesses the quality and importance of each composer's work, and makes an annual proposition to amend his number of points.<sup>29</sup> A larger committee of 15 to 20 composers approves the proposals of the smaller committee. The actual monetary value of a point changes commensurately with the total collective income. When somebody dies, their widow receives half of their sum for life. According to Farkas

23 Péter Halász. Interview. 31 March 2006

24 Béla Faragó. Interview. 26 March 2006

25 Ibid.

26 Jenő Pertis. Interview. 25 March 2006. Mr. Pertis described a political conflict between globalization and nationalism that occurred about six years ago within the composition field.

27 Miklós Malek. Interview. 24 March 2006.

28 Máté Hollós, "With the Millennium is the Lot of Hungarian Composers Changing for the Better?" In *Contemporary Music*, 2000, 14.

29 The small committee of Artisjus, which rarely changes, now consists of Máté Hollós, Iván Madarász, Miklós Sugár, and two "light music" composers (János Bródy and one other). Zoltán Farkas. Interview. 30 March 2006.

"most composers are completely satisfied" with this system. "One who really does his work can enter, with a handful of points, and then the process will start."<sup>30</sup>

Between present Hungarian musical organizations and those of the communist era, the greatest difference is an increase in collectivity. Under communism, a single composer (such as András Mihály or Emil Petrovics) could determine the allocation of royalty income, those in power were immune to criticism. For example, when Mihály ceased composing, nobody dared to diminish his number of points; the excuse was given that "his hands are trembling, so unfortunately he cannot compose."<sup>31</sup> Other organizations presently important to composers include the extensive computer database at the Budapest Music Center, the Hungarian Copyright Company and the Composers Union – overlapping but separate groups – and the Hungarian Music Council, which sometimes makes artistic recommendations to the state. In 2000, the Council issued a comprehensive print database of performing organizations, concert presenters, grants, and other aspects of Hungarian musical life.<sup>32</sup>

30 Ibid.

31 Zoltán Farkas. Interview. 30 March 2006.

32 As of March 2006, the print database issued by the Hungarian Music Council in 2000 had not been updated due to "laziness," according to Eszter Vida of the Budapest Music Center, but she had been updating it independently with the myriad changes that occurred in the various organizations within this relatively short time period.

## Publishing and Recording

The impact of the change to a free market system in Hungary is clearly evident in the publishing and recording industries. Fewer new Hungarian works are published now, and the nature of the published works is different. Under communism, "official" composers were guaranteed to have their pieces, with the possible exception of larger stage works, published by the state-run Editio Musio Budapest. Although that guarantee disappeared abruptly in 1990, the model persists in composers' minds and this makes adjustment difficult. Together with the free market came a "catch-22" operant in the publishing of concert music everywhere: Its rate of return is neither as immediate nor as high as that of pop music; publishers fail to promote composers' works, and then turn around and complain that sales of their works are not sufficient to make publishing them worthwhile.

When Editio was sold to Ricordi in the late 1990s, Zoltán Jeney – (president of the composers' association at the time) – fought for a system that he had observed in Scandinavia, by which the state would hold a portion of the firm's income in a fund for Hungarian composers to publish their works. Two consecutive governments promised to adopt this system, but ultimately that promise went unfulfilled. Presently Editio, like any publisher in the world, acts as a private firm: It handpicks its composers, promoting only a handful of Hungarians.<sup>33</sup>

33 Péter Halász. Interview. 31 March 2006.

The last fifteen years have witnessed the birth of a number of smaller publishing houses, such as Akkord,<sup>34</sup> and some composers consider this new diversity to be an advantage.<sup>35</sup> There is an accompanying change in the types of works published, however. The small publishing houses publish more choral music, piano pieces, and chamber works which are easier to prepare for publication than orchestral works with greater graphic complexity. For the larger works, it is rare for composers to find a publisher. “If you look everywhere in the world, publishing possibilities have changed. A contract with a publishing house is not assured [to most composers]. These are ways that Hungarian composers could learn, but I don’t think that they want to. They complain about the loss of their publishing house, but they don’t do anything to work against it,” says Halász.<sup>36</sup> Some composers have begun to self-publish. In general, it is much more common for composers to have music recorded by Hungaroton or the radio and released on CD than for their scores to be published – although many interviewees, when asked if one may currently buy their CDs in Budapest, say no.

34 The publishing firm Akkord, as well as the Hungaroton recording label, is run by composer Máté Hollós.

35 For composer Jenő Pertis, the change from the exclusive Editio to a multiplicity of smaller publishing houses is a positive one, and serves as “one example of politics. The boss used to be the minister. Now there are alternatives.” Jenő Pertis. Interview. 25 March 2006.

36 Péter Halász. Interview. 31 March 2006.

## Commissioning, Performances, and the Radio

In conversation with composers, the model comes to light of the state having previously called upon them to work, but now “waiting around, asking ‘why don’t they call me?’”<sup>37</sup> Some claim that there were more concerts and commissions under the old regime; others say that there are more now. It is relatively rare for composers to mount their own concerts. Faragó says that “nobody organizes their own concerts; everyone wants to gain the sponsorship or three large firms,” which he likens to “a tap that turns on and off.” “Because there are no state concerts, people can only organize when sponsors are there.”<sup>38</sup>

Commissions were more numerous pre-1990. According to Máté Hollós, “the main customers in the previous decades were the Ministry of Culture, Hungarian Television, the Hungarian Radio, and State (later National) Philharmonia. They no longer have funds at their command.”<sup>39</sup> Who is doing the commissioning now? “The metropolitan administration of Budapest, the local authorities of other towns or possibly the orchestras managed by them may every now and then invite composers to create works; and most recently it has been the Local Composers

37 Miklós Malek. Interview. 24 March 2006.

38 Béla Faragó. Interview. 26 March 2006.

39 Máté Hollós, “With the Millennium is the Lot of Hungarian Composers Changing for the Better?” In *Contemporary Music*, 2000, 10.

Program of the National Cultural Fund (NCF) which has helped to bring together ensembles and composers for the creation of new works.”<sup>40</sup> The Budapest Spring and Autumn Festivals also commission works. Many “commissions” reported by interviewees are from performers, with no money involved.

The radio, as always relatively independent from the market, historically made and broadcast many recordings of new music. The period since 1990 has witnessed many changes in its management. Composers claim that it used to be more of a cultural center, since the radio orchestra specialized in contemporary music thorough the 1970s and 80s but no longer does. Its studio facility for electro-acoustic music is still operant, but the technical facilities are no longer state-of-the-art.

## Hungary in the International New-Music Sphere

With the opening of Hungary’s borders, composers could travel more freely than before, and the flow of information and music to and from abroad grew more profuse through the 1990s and the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These factors might presuppose both an increase in foreign successes and a much greater range of foreign musical influences. Foreign music had been restricted up to the late 1950s, with the severity of

40 Ibid., page 11.

the restrictions loosening through the 1960s.<sup>41</sup> Thus composers who assembled in secret to hear Stockhausen and Webern in the late 1950s could travel to Vienna to buy scores by the mid-1960s,<sup>42</sup> and many had performances abroad in the 1980s. After 1990, grants from the Sörös foundation and other sources facilitated cultural exchange with the west.<sup>43</sup>

Despite a broadening and deepening interaction with the west, only a few Hungarian composers have achieved international stature. The careers of the three generally cited – György Kurtág, György Ligeti, and Péter Eötvös – differed considerably. Kurtág, who remained at home through the early 1990s, became known largely on the basis of music that he had written in Hungary, but gained greater exposure after he left the country. Ligeti, who had left in 1956, had a kind of “homecoming” – (and reconciliation with the Hungarian authorities) – in 1978, but meanwhile resided in Germany. Eötvös maintained official terms with the authorities under Communism but developed an active conducting career abroad.<sup>44</sup> Farkas cites

41 Zoltán Farkas. Interview. 30 March 2006.

42 Hungarian musicologist Anna Dalos is carrying out research that will allow her to detect which new foreign pieces became known in Hungary during this period.

43 Grants for travel and work abroad cited by composers in the survey include the Alban Berg scholarship in Vienna, The Kellner Foundation in the US, and (most commonly) Fulbright and Sörös Foundation fellowships.

44 Péter Eötvös was a “special case” because of bad conscience on the part of the authorities with regard to his former teacher, Imre Vince. Thus when he sought to study in Cologne in 1966, Ferenc Szabó

the foreign residence of these three composers – (besides their writing great music) – as crucial to their gaining international attention and prestige.<sup>45</sup> Halász explains their “transcendence” of what it is possible to achieve from within Hungary by way of the fact that they “live in a different world and have different people on their horizons.” He cites some contemporary Hungarian writers, such as Eszterházy and Nadas, who have achieved this level of “transcendence” from within Hungary, as Kurtág was able to do. “It is a question of intellectual capacity -- it doesn’t matter where you live, it is who you are.”<sup>46</sup> It is crucial to recognize that most Hungarians would not consider the ex-patriots Kurtág, Ligeti, and Eötvös to be Hungarian composers in the true sense of the word.

Farkas presents András Szöllösy, Sándor Balassa, and Jeney as “counter-examples” – composers who belong to the same generation, who have composed great music, and who have had exposure abroad, but have not become as well known. He gives two reasons for this: The weakness of promotion in Hungary, and the composer’s own attitudes. “Balassa was warmly received in England and Germany in the early 1970s. But he himself was not interested in becoming well known abroad. He wanted speak to Hungarians, to gain success in his

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– his teacher at the time, and also a communist – wrote a letter for him that secured permission. Jeney also wanted to study in Cologne during that period, but was denied permission.

45 Zoltán Farkas. Interview. 30 March 2006.

46 Péter Halász. Interview. 31 March 2006.

homeland. This aspiration clearly derives from his nationalistic attitude.”<sup>47</sup>

85.7 percent of the composers interviewed who responded to the question, when asked if they think that Hungary is musically isolated, say no (only 14.3 percent says yes). International influences in their music have grown more prevalent and heterogeneous in the last fifteen years. The American music which they cite as important or influential to their music is something of an indicator as to their level of familiarity with foreign music. It is generally either George Crumb, Steve Reich (what they refer to as “repetitive” music), or progressive jazz.<sup>48</sup> A number of the composers interviewed claim that they were influenced by minimalism in the 1990s, but no longer are. According to Farkas, the musical world of Reich is “rather restricted...it reached a level, established an idiom, and stopped.” Consequently some composers view it as “an attractive but closed world that belongs to their youth.”<sup>49</sup> The fact that only two or three of the composers interviewed are familiar with the music

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47 Zoltán Farkas. Interview. 30 March 2006. Farkas also gives the special case of Miklós Kocsár’s renown in Japan, where a choir competition is named after him Halász cites Balassa and Durkó as composers who gained success in the West in the late 1960s and early 70s, mainly through support from the publishing house Boosey and Hawkes, but says that they “disappeared quite fast” because, to Western ears, they “always produced the same things.” Péter Halász. Interview. 31 March 2006.

48 When asked to name the greatest American composers, the majority of the composers interviewed said Bernstein, Gershwin, Ives, or Copland.

49 Zoltán Farkas. Interview. 30 March 2006.

of American composers younger than Crumb or Reich suggests that perhaps Hungary is more musically isolated than many believe.

Hungarian composers, like many composers from other parts of Europe, tend to absorb influences by “objectifying” them. They are compelled to put a label on the style of those influences in order to come to terms with them conceptually and to place their own work clearly in relation to them. In many instances this leads to a definition of what the music is not, rather than what it is. In American music, influences are generally absorbed more fluidly and seamlessly into the composer’s individual idiom. Composers do not feel such a need to define the influences *a priori*, or to place themselves in a group on account of those influences. It is possible that Hungarian composers, even in the last fifteen years, have been limited (or rendered short-sighted) by a persistent, although slowly diminishing, isolation. It is illuminating that they have felt the need to conceive of themselves in groups in order to feel strong, although this tendency is also diminishing. When asked what the greatest obstacle has been to their life as composers, a number of those interviewed cite the fact that they “do not belong to any compositional group or school.”<sup>50</sup>

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50 Péter Tóth. Email interview. 27 March 2006. Others also expressed this idea.

## Musical “Hungarian-ness”

National identity and the use of folk elements in Hungarian music are closely bound with the legacy of Bartók and Kodály. To come to terms with this influence and the “anxiety”<sup>51</sup> that it arouses is the greatest challenge (and certainly one of the greatest inspirations) facing Hungarian composers in the last century, one that persists today. It is important to distinguish between deliberate attempts to write “Hungarian” music, and unconscious manifestation of national characteristics on the part of composers.<sup>52</sup> In different ways during the last 50 years, composers have made a deliberate effort to define “Hungarian-ness” in music. Among “mainstream” composers in the 1950s and 60s – “traditionalists who once belonged to the avant-garde”<sup>53</sup> – a desire to seek and to uphold distinctly Hungarian qualities was, according to

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51 Harold Bloom’s vision of the relations between precursors and the individual artist, put forth in his study of the Romantic poets, *The Anxiety of Influence*. (Oxford University Press, 1973), may also serve to illuminate patterns of influence in modern music. The crux of his argument is that all modern literary texts reflect a strong “misreading” of those that precede them.

52 Péter Eötvös says that “as to what a foreigner perceives as being Hungarian in music, that is hard to tell. All I can say, once again, is that it lies above all in the articulation. I reckon that I can discern a Hungarian quality of articulation in the music of Ligeti and Kurtág as well as in my own pieces.” The articulation that Eötvös defines arises out of the rhythms of the language. Zoltán Farkas. “Music-Making Begins with Articulation: Péter Eötvös in Conversation with Zoltán Farkas. *Hungarian Musical Quarterly*, 2005, 147.

53 Petrovics, Sándor Szokolay, Zsolt Durkó, Kocsár, Attila Bozay, Balassa, and Lendvai. Zoltán Farkas. Interview. 30 March 2006.

Halász, a stylistic “common purpose.” “Back in the 1960s, after they realized the irrelevance of socialist realism, many Hungarian composers began to write in the modernist (“free-twelve-tone”) idiom, a kind of expressionism. Most of them also shared a principle of an idealized Hungarian intonation. There are special characteristics that make the music “Hungarian:” From Bartók, a kind of chromaticism, a *lamento* style, a type of pitch organization. It is difficult to define...but there is a similar sound imagination behind it.<sup>54</sup>

Did the system change impact ideas of national identity as they are manifest in the music written in Hungary. In 1990 and the subsequent period, composers who had been well established in the 1960s and 70s “shouted everywhere that they were oppressed.” “If you look back to the 1960s and 70s, all of them had their own very well-defined compromises to live with the regime. They could live very well, their music was played, recorded, and published...they had everything that they needed. What they could get only temporarily was the international acclaim.” Through the 1980s, these composers were the cream of Hungary’s limited cultural offerings. After 1990, when a wider range of offerings became available, they “found themselves very lonely.”<sup>55</sup>

One musical response to the system change on the part of composers who had been well established during communism was an impetus toward “populism” or accessibility. Most began to absorb

“post-modern” or “polystylistic” features after 1990, as Ligeti had done in the 1980s. Farkas cites “The Four” – György Orbán, János Vajda, Miklós Csemicsky, and Selmeczi – who once wrote avante-garde (or “free dodecaphonic”) music but who, after 1990, began to write as attractively as possible for the audience, incorporating any available influences toward this end. Since they are now active as teachers, they are influencing the younger generation differently than the ex-New-Music-Studio composers who are also teaching. “Aesthetically there tends to be a divide between the group who was audience-friendly and is teaching now, and the more experimental older composers.”<sup>56</sup> Writing church music also emerged as a means of “finding an institution to popularize your music.” In other words, “if it is not the party it can be the church.”<sup>57</sup> Thus Kamilló Lendvay, who had produced an oratorio on Lenin’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in the early 1970s, “progressed” to large-scale religious works (*Via Crucis* in 1988-89 and *Stabat Mater* in 1991) twenty years later.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the New Music Studio members broke from both the quest to establish a Hungarian voice, and the abiding influence of Bartók. Farkas cites three motivating factors behind their drive to seek alternative musical means: the shadow of Bartók’s legacy, the burden of their overly academic training – (the curriculum at the Academy, with its “formal studies” and folk-song arrangements, was extremely conservative) – and the limitations imposed

by censorship. Influences from abroad, often conceptual rather than musical, helped guide their experimentalism. The writings of John Cage provided the theoretical background for much of their music and affirmed things that they had already begun to think about. Messaien and the French Spectralists provided inspiration for Tihányi and for Vidovsky, who studied in Paris 1970-71. The Italian Giofredo Petrassi taught Jeney, Szöllösy, Lajos Huszár, and Zsolt Durkó. He liberated them from the Bartókian influence by pointing out elements that were “*come Bartók*” and therefore objectionable.<sup>58</sup> Writing film or incidental music for theaters also allowed free experimentation – you could write anything for film – and provided income for those blacklisted. As a consequence, composers such as Jeney, Eötvös, and Szöllösy wrote film music during the 1970s but largely ceased after 1990. The group in whom, under Communism, musical and political subversiveness intersected is now in a position of power in the field.

The subgroup of “experimental” composers that followed in the wake of the New Music Studio, inspired by their live performances of music from Cage to Stockhausen, formed Group180. The collective was fomed in 1978, and its members, who included Béla Faragó, András Sóos, and László Melis, “displayed a strong inclination for integrating avante-garde concepts with different popular music trends.”<sup>59</sup> Toward this

end, they have employed electro-acoustic elements, combined them with live performance, improvised, and absorbed influences from rock or pop music, as well as American minimalism. The dissolution of the collective in 1992 coincides roughly with the system change.

The ideal of “musical Hungarian-ness” may not always be central for Hungarian composers, but it is omnipresent. Of the composers interviewed, 80 per cent say that national identity (or “Hungarian-ness”) is important to them as composers, but many say that it is not deliberately reflected in their music.<sup>60</sup> Some composers claim an active relationship to Hungarian folk music, but also derive inspiration and musical materials from the folk music of other countries, in keeping with a global trend toward diversification. The common denominator among Hungarian composers in 2006 is still the legacy of Bartók and Kodály. Of the composers who answered the question, 85 per cent say that their music has a concrete relation to the legacy of Bartók and Kodály. Of the 15 percent who say they do not, many still say that they have some more oblique relationship with it. “It is in our blood, in our consciousness.”<sup>61</sup>

In *Contemporary Music* – , 7.

60 “National identity” can be multifaceted and complex to define. For example, Jenő Pertis said that the musical inheritances of his father, a gypsy violinist, and his mother, a Hungarian pianist, were equally important to him.

61 Katalin Szalai. Email interview. March 31 2006. Many other composers also gave their own variations on this statement.

54 Péter Halász. Interview. 30 March 2006.

55 Ibid.

56 Zoltán Farkas. Interview. 30 March 2006.

57 Ibid.

58 Zoltán Farkas. Interview. 30 March 2006.

59 Peter Halász. “Hungarian Composers of the Last Five Decades.”

## Hungarian Composers Now: Who is Listening?

The Hungarian composition field in 2006 is eclectic, changeable, and multi-layered. One thing that composers agree upon is that it is “mixed.” Some composers claim that the system change had no effect whatsoever upon their work. The picture that emerges, however, is of a field that is now “freer,” more open to foreign influences, and more amenable to performances of the works of certain composers, but with greater material uncertainty. “We can composer freely, but the social esteem and the support is little.”<sup>62</sup> Issues shared among all composers are “making a living, recognition, supporting our children.”<sup>63</sup> Asked if they are (or were) ever tempted to move abroad because it would be better for their careers, 40 per cent of those who responded to the question say yes, and 60 percent say no. Some describe a negative “gap” between the older generation (those in their 60s or older) and the younger generation (those in their 20s and 30s). Balász Horváth, born in 1975, says that “there must be a gap between the older and younger generations. I think that this gap is healthy - we would write the same music as them without it. It is good that we think differently about music, because

62 István Szigeti. Interview. 24 March 2006.

63 Katalin Szalai. Email interview. March 31 2006. Most say that it is impossible to make a living at composition. Composers in Hungary work as the musical directors of theatres, write commercial music, conduct, and teach. Over half of the composers that participated in the interviews are practicing performers.

then I can tell them my opinion and they will let me know the opposite point of view. That helps me to rethink my side and open my mind.”<sup>64</sup>

Regarding the most important Budapest musical event in the last year, the consensus among both composers and scholars is Zoltán Jeney’s *Funeral Rite*.<sup>65</sup> Some also name the Kurtág festival.<sup>66</sup> The *Funeral Rite* was a musical event of epic proportions that took decades to be realized. Sections had been performed before, but the 2005 performance was the premiere of the complete version. According to Farkas, the work is indicative of Jeney’s reaching a place where Hungarian musical elements take center stage. “It was not natural for him to get inspiration from folk music (and plainchant) earlier. This reconciliation with tradition happened very late in his life. It is never one-sided – there is always a context that makes the quotations, and this style, more complex.”<sup>67</sup> Halász calls it “a completely different way of thinking about music than 30 or 40 years ago.”<sup>68</sup> Jeney himself says that he did not think of the Hungarian elements consciously, and that the “derived” elements constitute an “archaization.”<sup>69</sup>

64 Balász Horváth. Email interview. 4 April 2006.

65 Jeney’s *Halotti Szerződés* was performed in the Palace of Arts on 22 October 2005 by the National Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir, conducted by Zoltán Kocsis.

66 The Kurtág Festival was a series of concerts that took place in February 2006 at the Palace of Arts in celebration of Kurtág’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

67 Zoltán Farkas. Interview. 30 March 2006.

68 Péter Halász. Interview. 30 March 2006

69 Zoltán Jeney. Interview. 6 April 2006.

The return to tradition on the part of composers is a much larger pattern. Many composers say that they are getting “more traditional” or “more listenable” with time. Composers under 35 are generally more conservative in their thinking than those in their 60s. Péter Durkó, born 1972, draws attention to the importance of “establishing spiritual contact with the cultural inheritance of previous ages...sooner or later, anybody with a calling will ask himself how he wants the essential elements of his music to relate specifically, personally to it.”<sup>70</sup> Some cite a “new clarity” or a “new simplicity” in the current of new Hungarian music. But few will admit to being part of any main current; Faragó, for example, identified the “new clarity” mentioned above but considers himself to be an “exception” to which no label applies.<sup>71</sup>

Who is the audience for new music in Hungary? A surprising number of the composers interviewed do not know who their audience is – they “just write the notes.” Asked who listens to their music, responses range from “relatives, friends, and radio listeners. The rest I don’t know”<sup>72</sup> to “I don’t keep track of who listens to my music – there are scientists who do that”<sup>73</sup> to “nobody.”<sup>74</sup> Hollós expressed a desire in 2000 to be able to look back with satisfaction upon what he and his colleagues have done “once

70 Péter Durkó. Interview. 25 March 2006.

71 Béla Faragó. Interview. 26 March 2006.

72 Péter Nográdi. Interview. 25 March 2006.

73 Tamás Beischer-Matyó. Interview. 24 March 2006.

74 Endre Juhász. Interview. 24 March 2006.

the middle class – the surest audience of artistic music – has been developed.”<sup>75</sup> According to Balázs Horváth, “the main problem in our country is in the brain of the people. People in Hungary think that things are black or white, avant-garde or conservative, liberal or conservative, etc., and they fight for their ideas. I think this comes from the older generation, and from the fact that the country is such a small one. When we can change this sick two-sided thinking, our musical world will open.”<sup>76</sup>

Ultimately, many developments in the field are not traceable to the system change, but are better accounted for as the result of a natural evolution. Many positive facets of Hungarian musical life predate the structural changes in 1990 – (The Mini-Festival, the Spring and Autumn Festivals) – and some have arisen since then (the new Palace of the Arts, opened in 2005). There are more Hungarian music periodicals now than before 1990. Perhaps, since the system change, Hungarian music may have lost its subversive bite. “In the 1950s, music was not free from political life, and this created a dissonance, as well as opening up new dimensions for young composers,” says Péter Durkó. “For my generation this is already past, history.”<sup>77</sup>

There is a persistent nostalgia for music from 30 years ago, some of which is being heard and discovered for the first time

75 Máté Hollós, “With the Millennium is the Lot of Hungarian Composers Changing for the Better?” In *Contemporary Music*, 2000, 14.

76 Balázs Horváth. Email interview. 4 April 2006.

77 Péter Durkó. Interview. 25 March 2006.



now. The final concert of Group 180 in the mid-1990s and already tended to be “nostalgic,” honoring something that used to be great.<sup>78</sup> Faragó says that the Kurtág festival is “a kind of museum” but that “the average listener considers this to be contemporary music.”<sup>79</sup> 2006 marks the release of a group composition by members of the New Music Studio, written in 1975 and recorded in 1986. Jeney says that “if this were a normal society, it should have been released in that time. Now it is historical. I’m glad that I still like it, that the piece hasn’t lost its originality. If I didn’t know that the piece was written in 1975, I could even say that it is new.”<sup>80</sup>

Hungary faces the same challenges as the contemporary-music field everywhere in the world. It will take strong, visionary individuals willing to take risks to breathe fresh air into the composition field and to draw in a new audience. Hungary has lost many of its important cultural figures at various junctures in the last century. The trend for important artists to leave the country has drawn away composing talent, leaving the younger composers without the chance to study and learn from them. Considerable time is needed to adjust to the effects of structural changes in 1990, and the rate of change is incremental. Still, it is still indisputable that Hungary is a musical power. If, for the first time in generations, the talent and energy of an entire generation

or more are concentrated within the country, if exchange with other countries is encouraged, and if restrictions from outside of the field that stunt composers’ growth are diminished, then new music in Hungary may flourish in the coming years.

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78 Zoltán Farkas. Interview. 30 March 2006.

79 Béla Faragó. Interview. 26 March 2006.

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# Policy Learning in Response to Extreme Flood Events in the Tisza and Pannonian Central Danube River Basins

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*The Danube River basin has had numerous extreme flooding events over the past decade, causing high levels of economic and ecological damage. Hungary, situated in the central region of the Danube River basin, historically has had a high level of flood risk exposure and has recently experienced an increase in extreme floods. Environmental policies across local level institutions in the central Danube River basin vary greatly (Pickvance, 2003). Research suggests that a high level of variation may also be present in the policy response to extreme floods at the local level in this region (Vári, 2003; Slávic, 2003). Successful responses to extreme events often reflect policy learning, the evolution of beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and goals in response to new information and experiences (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999; Busenberg, 2001). To understand factors that promote policy learning, this research examines the following questions: (1) What factors are associated with observed variations in policy change and learning related to flood mitigation and prevention at the local level? (2) To what extent has scientific and*