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The Performance Practice of Classical Music in Hungary. Institutions, Schools and Personalities

(Translated by Andor Kelenhegyi)

Introduction

Hungarian musical performance practice have started to become an independent stream of art in the musical culture of Hungary during the 19th century, partly due to influential musicians, partly due to institutions established as a result of their work. This era is epitomized by two such standard-bearers, Ferenc Erkel and Ferenc Liszt, who as pianists, conductors and also as teachers have set out the bases of institutions which influence Hungarian musical culture up to the present day. They took active part in establishing the National Theatre in 1837; the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra in 1853; the Liszt Academy of Music in 1875, and the Hungarian State Opera in 1884. While Erkel participated mostly as a pianist and as a conductor, Ferenc Liszt was first only occasionally present, as a homecoming virtuoso. In his late years, however, he spent one third of his time in Budapest as a piano teacher and a conductor, enriching Hungarian musical life. The Academy of Music organized by them continues to educate talented musicians up until today. Thus, despite the changing framework, the tradition still survives.

Naturally, events and inventions of the 20th century contributed much to the institutional background laid down in the 19th century. One of the novelties was the startup of the Hungarian Radio, which has been broadcasting music programs since its inauguration (December 1 1925) thus, providing opportunities for talented youngsters as well as for well-established artists to perform. It served the Hungarian public with opera and concert broadcasts, regular programs of musical critiques (*Új Zenei Újság* [New Musical Journal]) and – especially in the 1970s – it emerged as one of the leading platforms of popularizing contemporary classical music.

It was also in the 20th century that musical competitions were organized for the first time. The opening one, entitled International Musical Competition in Budapest was arranged in 1933 in remembrance of Ferenc Liszt. It was followed by many further competitions in different categories. By now, international and Hungarian competitions in Budapest organized by the Hungarian Radio and the Philharmony, look back on a several decades long tradition, and have fostered the careers of numerous young performers and musical bands. When studying musical performance practice, we cannot disregard one of the greatest technical developments of the turn of 19th century, the sound recording. Although Thomas Alva Edison intended the phonograph to be of use primarily in offices, the Pathé brothers and Emil Berliner have soon realized that sound recordings can serve the industry of the entertainment as well. This invention paved the way for the first classical music recordings at the beginning of the 20th century. Classical music recordings, just as today, have only been a snippet of the disc-market. Nevertheless, it might be said that although the first complete

recording of an opera (Verdi's *Ernani*) took place only in 1903, by 1906 the voices of almost all notable singers of the age have been recorded. In 1913, the first complete record of a symphony was produced (Beethoven's 5th, conducted by Artur Nikisch). Hungary, as a result of its central position in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was in the forefront of worldwide sound recording from the very beginning. Major international recording firms (such as The Gramophone Company, Columbia Records, Pathé, Favorite, Dacapo etc.) opened their subsidiaries in Budapest one after the other. The first gramophone without a cylinder (Eufon) was patented in Hungary, in 1907. In 1908 the First Hungarian Disc Factory [Első Magyar Hanglemezzgyár] was established. This factory could execute all aspects of disc production in Hungary. Thanks to these recordings, one can still listen to records of the greatest Hungarian performers of the first years of the 20th century.

World War I, and the ensuing Treaty of Trianon resulted in a major drawback in the history of Hungarian sound recording. Disc production could only resume in 1925, but already in the next year – as a result of the invention of microphones – electronic recording technique was put into practice. International companies and their Hungarian subsidiaries still presided over disc recording in Hungary during the interwar period. The only Hungarian recording firm was Radiola. Among its recordings, one can find performances of Ede Zathurecky, Kálmán Pataky, and several other famous Hungarian performers. A significant classical repertoire was recorded on the Hungarian label of the Eternola-Edison Bell company as well, including recordings of Ernő Dohnányi and Lajos Kentner. Some of the most famous recordings of the era were the *His Master's Voice Series* from 1928, featuring Bartók, Kodály and Lajtha, and the *Patria-Series* distributed by Péter Pál Kelen's disc company.

The Tonalit Company started after the end of World War II. It was soon socialized, and became the only disc producer in Hungary for decades, first as Magyar Hanglemezzgyártó Vállalat (Hungarian Disc Producing Company), later as Qualiton, then as Hungaroton. During its monopoly in the LP-period, Hungaroton earned international acclaim with several of its prize-winning recordings not only to itself, but to Hungarian performers and composers as well. It was only in the 1980s, that further disc producers appeared on the Hungarian market. From 1990s, when CDs became widespread, it seems yet almost impossible to trace the history of Hungarian disc producing. Apart from major international companies, and the numerous smaller Hungarian enterprises, many performers produce and distribute their own CDs.

The Beginnings of Institutionalized Education in Music – The “Nemzeti Zenede” and the Liszt Academy of Music

The oldest institution of musical education in Hungary is related to the Pest-Buda Hangászegyesület (Pest-Buda Voice Association) established in 1836. The Association's singing school was founded in 1840, under the direction of Gábor Mátray. In the beginning the two institutions were financially separated, but from 1867, they operated jointly under the name Nemzeti Zenede (National Conservatory). This institution took responsibility for training both professional and amateur musicians and up until 1918 without interruption. During this time, it provided education for several excellent musicians of Hungary and the international musical culture (such as Leopold Auer, Henrik Benkő, János Ferencsik, István Kerner, Vilmos Komor, Teréz Krammer and Géza Kresz). Moreover, Mihály Bächer, György Faragó, Jenő Hubay, Endre Koréh, Frigyes Reiner and Árpád Szendy also began their musical studies in the Zenede. The series of “historical concerts”, which were first held in the

academic year 1921/1922 proved to be a pioneering initiative. This series was one of the first examples of the early music movement in Hungary. After several structural changes, the Nemzeti Zenede continued to operate as a conservatory from 1948. Its present successor, the Béla Bartók Secondary School of Music, where more than twenty musical specializations are available on an intermediate level, serves also as a training school for the Liszt Academy of Music.

The Liszt Academy of Music was established in 1875, and it is still the flagship of musical education in Hungary. This is the only music academy in the world which was founded by Ferenc Liszt. The Academy took Liszt's name in 1925, on the institution's fiftieth anniversary. While in its first academic year, the Academy had only five instructors and thirty eight students, only five years later it could move to a new location (the so-called "Old Music Academy"). Its monumental palace at the Liszt Ferenc Square was finished in 1907, and a little more than a century later, in 2011, a new building of the Academy, which was named after György Ligeti, was inaugurated at Wesselényi Street 52. The present educational system of the Academy includes a division of preparatory education for outstanding young talents, a Classical Music Department, a Jazz Department, a Church Music Department, an Early Music department and a Folk Music Department. The Academy also has a Doctoral School (providing DLA [DMA] and PhD titles). Thus, it covers the entirety of Hungarian musical culture and education.

Schools of Instruments at the Liszt Academy of Music

Due to the centrality of the Liszt Academy of Music, the education of musical instruments has a family tree-like structure in Hungary. At the roots of such an imagined chain of teachers and pupils there is always a respected master, who has significant achievement both as a performer and – through his students – as a teacher. Until the second half of the 20th century, these masters have often been composers as well, for example, Ferenc Liszt, Jenő Hubay, Dávid Popper, Leó Weiner, György Kurtág, András Mihály, and the doyen of the new generation of pianist, although also drawing back to Liszt, Pál Kadosa. The frequently mentioned "family tree of Liszt" extended through the pupils of István Thomán (Béla Bartók, Ernő Dohnányi, and Arnold Székely). It is, of course, reasonable to inquire how much the reputation of one's student reflects the achievements of the teacher. While among Dohnányi's disciples there are several world-famous pianists (Géza Anda, György Cziffra, György Faragó, Annie Fischer, Andor Földes, Endre Petri, Péter Solymos and Kornél Zempléni), Liszt's legacy passed on to fewer famous pianists through Bartók (György Sándor, Lajos Hernádi, and the disciples of the latter, Tamás Vásáry, Péter Frankl). The third significant disciple of Thomán, Arnold Székely had trained seemingly even fewer famous disciples, but one finds among them Pál Kadosa, who has been the master of almost every member of the generation of those grand pianists, who started their careers in the end of the 1960's (Zoltán Kocsis, Dezső Ránki, Jenő Jandó, András Schiff and many others.) The success of Kadosa's master school owes just as much to two former disciples of him, the assistant professors, György Kurtág and Ferenc Rados. Their master courses attract crowds of musicians from all around the world up to the present day. Due to the above described family tree-like structure, every contemporary Hungarian pianist may claim to be Liszt's successors in some way.

Another question might address what each individual or the later generations have inherited from Liszt's legacy. The methods of Liszt, who has been instructing his students at home, is quite similar to the master courses today, and is well-known from the descriptions of several disciples of Liszt. Group education and the concept of master schools, in which, following the

performance of the student, the “master” presents how the piece “should be interpreted”, is typical of the educational approaches of several 20th century Hungarian pianists. A further characteristic feature of Hungarian pianists stems from the fact that their “musical native language” was Hungarian. Although each of them has one or more preferred fields in the history of music, in which they really feel at home (Zoltán Kocsis prefers Beethoven, Debussy and the composers of contemporary music, Dezső Ránki romantic piano works, for Jenő Jandó Liszt, and for András Schiff the music of Bach and the Vienna classicism is favored), but they all feel very close to the oeuvre of Bartók. This tendency started with the Bartók-interpretation of György Sándor, Andor Földes and Géza Anda. It influenced even virtuosos like György Cziffra, who played Bartók’s Piano Concerto No. 2 on his last concert (22 October 1956) before leaving Hungary.

Similar things might be said about the training of violinists. In this case, the basis of the “family tree” was Jenő Hubay, whose father, Károly Huber established the violin department at the Liszt Academy of Music in 1884-1885. Hubay has left the conservatory of Brussels in order to take up a position at the Music Academy in Budapest. This decision has not only shaped the traditions of string-education, but the entirety of the musical life in Hungary. He stayed at the Liszt Academy until his death: first, as a teacher, then as the president of the Academy and subsequently as the conductor of its orchestra. He was introducing his disciples into the Hungarian musical life on concerts held in his own palace. Many world-famous violinists started their careers in Hubay’s classes, among them József Szigeti, Ferenc Vecsey, the Arányi sisters (Jelly and Adila), Imre Waldbauer, Zoltán Székely, Endre Gertler, Emil Telmányi, Sándor Végh and Ede Zathureczky. Two very important violin teachers of the second half of the 20th century are among the disciples of Ede Zathureczky: György Pauk, who was active mostly abroad, and Dénes Kovács, who was a teacher and later president of the Liszt Academy. Later on, his legacy was inherited by Eszter Perényi, the master of many young violinists of our age.

The legacy of Bartók, discussed above with regard to pianists, can be detected in the case of violinists too. The two sonatas for violin and piano premiered by Jelly Arányi are perhaps too rarely performed, but the two violin rhapsodies composed for József Szigeti and Zoltán Székely and the Violin Concerto for Székely have become standards in the repertoires of Hungarian violinists.

Dávid Popper, who founded the cello department at the Liszt Academy in 1886, did also transmit his art to the 20th century through several talented pupils. Among his students was Jenő Kerpely, the first performer of Kodály’s *Sonata for Solo Cello Op. 8* and *Cello Sonata Op. 4* and later teacher of János Starker and Ede Banda. All of these artists have educated further generations of cellists, for example, Miklós Perényi, one of the leading cellists of our days studied with Starker. A later “family tree” of cello training was established by Antal Friss, whose disciples László Mező and Csaba Onczay are teaching at the Liszt Academy of Music up to the present day.

Traditions of Chamber Music Education

It is due to several exceptional musicians that Hungarian chamber music education yielded a number of world-renowned musicians to both Hungarian and international musical life. The masters of this school were Leó Wiener, András Mihály, Ferenc Rados and György Kurtág. The first ensembles, with a significant duration were the string-quartet labeled with Jenő Hubay and Dávid Popper, and later, modelled on this, the Waldbauer-Kerpely Quartett

(1909). The first major achievement of Leó Weiner's teaching activity was the establishing of the Léner String Quartet in 1919. Later on, the first string quartet of Sándor Végh – installed in 1935, from 1938 on as Hungarian String Quartet, lead by Zoltán Székely –, Végh Quartet (1940), the Tátrai String Quartet (1946) and the Bartók String Quartet (1957) all reputed Weiner's teaching.

Following the death of Weiner, the training of the string quartets was continued by András Mihály. Kodály String Quartet (1966), Éder Quartet (1974), Takács Quartet (1975) and Keller Quartet (1986) were established during his time. The Bartók, Kodály, Takács and Keller Quartets – although somewhat transformed – are active up to the present day.

Hungarian string quartets – in fact, by virtue of Weiner, Kurtág and András Mihály – excel at the consciousness of their performance, the transparent display of musical structure and the accurate presentation of the interior processes of the composition. Apart from teachers, the by now traditional Weiner competitions of the Liszt Academy also help motivating the organization of ensembles. In the diminishing presence of chamber music in present day musical culture, it is essential for Hungarian quartets to participate and to achieve successes in chamber music competitions both home and abroad, so as to ensure the rank and position of chamber music.

Apart from string quartets, the number of chamber music ensembles is very limited. The example of renowned international piano trios (Beaux Arts Trio, Florestan Trio, Parnassus Trio etc.) did not catch on among Hungarian musicians. Musicians are not exclusively responsible for this situation. The audience and concert organizers are likewise liable, as the bitter example of the 20th century has showed: the Hungarian musical life can not provide for a permanent chamber music ensemble with a piano. Even though, there could have been initiatives, for example, Péter Frankl and György Pauk, who won the 1957 ARD Music Competition in Munich in Chamber Music. The CD of Bartók's pieces that the latter produced together with Jenő Jandó and the violinist Kálmán Berkes was nominated for a Grammy Award. The standards of Hungarian chamber music playing in the second half of the 20th century are well represented by the chamber music series of the Hungaroton (the sonata recordings of Mihály Bächer, Dénes Kovács, Péter Csaba and Zoltán Kocsis and Miklós Szenthelyi and András Schiff, the piano trio recordings of Dénes Kovács, Ede Banda and Ferenc Rados, or the LP-Series featuring the chamber music pieces of Brahms) Nevertheless, today one will rather encounter occasional ensembles at piano-based chamber music concerts. Permanent cooperations lasting for decades, such as that of Vilmos Szabadi and Márta Gulyás or that of the Egri-Petris Duo (Mónika Egri and Attila Petris), are rather exceptional.

Similarly to international trends, wind instruments have become autonomous concert instruments in Hungary only in the 20th century. Performers capable of huge achievements playing solo – due to the peculiarities of the relatively narrow repertoires of the 20th century – had to succeed relying on arrangements or on contemporary music. By virtue of the excellent training of wind instruments in Hungary, successful performers could formulate ensembles. Therefore, again due to the repertoire, first woodwind quintets (Budapest Windquintet in 1947, Hungarian Windquintet in 1961), then brass ensembles (Modern Brass Orchestra in 1974, Ewald Quintet in 1996, Corpus Trombone Quartet in 2001) were organized in Hungary.

Operatic Performance Practice in Budapest

The Hungarian Theatre, later National Theatre opened its doors in 1837. Its first opera conductor was Ferenc Erkel. At the beginning, the operatic department of the Színitanoda (Drama School), established in 1865, was responsible for training the new generations of operatic singers, who was necessary for performing operas in Hungarian. As the Academy of Music opened its Department of Vocal Studies in 1882, the two training systems had to be harmonized. This took place in 1887, when Ödön Mihalovich became the joint head of the two institutions. The two institutions again parted in 1893, and the operatic training was moved, once and for all, to the Academy of Music. In its new building, there was a small operatic studio for the students of the opera classes. The first singing teachers of the Academy were Rikárd Pauli and Adél Passy-Cornet. Subsequently, several exceptional singers of the Royal Hungarian Opera joined them.

In 1884, the former operatic ensemble separated from the National Theatre, and the Royal Hungarian Opera was established with thirty four singers at Sugár Avenue (today Andrásy Avenue). In the first years of the 20th century, the bulk of the repertoire consisted of the works of Wagner, Puccini and of Erkel's two famous operas, *Hunyadi László* and *Bánk bán*. The late Hungarian premiere of *Tristan und Isolde*, and the Hungarian premieres of *Tosca*, *La bohème* and *Madama Butterfly* (all of them took place only a few years after their world premieres), and the presence of several outstanding singers have made the Royal Hungarian Opera the most popular theater of Budapest by 1907. Subsequent, and similarly up-to-date premieres were *La faincuilla del West*, *Elektra*, *Salome*, and *Der Rosenkavalier*. The most belated additions to the repertoire were perhaps the operas of Russian composers. The first Russian premiere in the Royal Hungarian Opera was that of the *Eugene Onegin* in 1901. But even the premiere of *Boris Godunov* in 1913 was quite unsuccessful. The popularity of Russian operas rose during the interwar period, with the revival of *Boris Godunov*, and the premieres of *Khovanshchina* and *The Queen of Spades*. It was obviously due to political reasons, that following World War II, no opera season could pass without a premiere or revival of a Russian piece of music. The innovativity of the Hungarian operatic culture had been however somewhat reduced, as there were less and less premieres in the Hungarian State Opera from the '80s. Moreover, contemporary pieces got to stage in Hungary much belated than at the turn of the 20th century, if they got to stage at all.

Among the exceptional Hungarian singers of the era preceding World War I, one can find singers who were educated privately, often abroad (such as Béla Környei, Elza Szamosi, Dezső Arányi or Dávid Ney), or who were trained in less notable musical establishments of Budapest (like Teréz Kammer) and who were educated at the Academy of Music (for example, Mihály Takáts, Vilmos Beck and Erzsi Sándor). Furthermore, many contracted, foreign singers featured at the stage of the State Opera, most of them were tenors (Italia Molina-Vasquez, Karel Burian or Georg Anthes). The position of the conductor was also alternately held by Hungarian and foreign artists. The Opera was even lead two times by world-famous, foreign musicians, by Gustav Mahler at the end of the 19th century, and Otto Klemperer at the middle of the 20th century. Both of them contributed much to the outstanding performances of Mozart's and Wagner's works in Hungary. Italian conductors (such as Egisto Tango and then Lamberto Gardelli) contracted to Hungary have, at the same time, resulted in a vivid Verdi-renaissance. Parallel to them, the Royal Hungarian Opera also had some excellent Hungarian conductors at the turn of the century, such as István Kerner and Dezső Márkus (the former is also known as the conductor and director of the Philharmonic Society, while the latter as the conductor and director of the People's Opera), and some further ones later, such as János Ferencsik, András Kórodi, Ervin Lukács and János Kovács.

The most remarkable singers of the interwar generation were mainly trained at the Liszt Academy of Music. Even compared to international standards, Budapest could provide an eminent training in singing at this period, thanks to the singing teachers József Sík and Béla Szabados. Some members of the Opera, for example, Georg Anthes, Bianka Maleczky and Ferenc Székelyhidy also worked as singing teachers at the time. However, international reputation was achieved only by a few of the singers, most of all those, who were contracted abroad as well (Mária Németh, Kálmán Pataky, Piroska Anday, and after World War II Sándor Svéd, Endre Koréh, Sándor Kónya, Júlia Hamari, Sylvia Sass, László Polgár, Andrea Rost, Éva Marton, Béla Perencz and others. And yet one can also find exceptional performers among those who stayed in Hungary (Mária Basilides, Imre Palló, Erzsébet Sándor, Mária Gyurkovics, Endre Rösler, György Radnai, József Simándy, József Réti, Róbert Ilosfalvy, György Melis, Margit László, Erzsébet Házy etc.).

But the studying of operatic performance practice in Hungary can not be restricted to Budapest. One shall not forget about the operatic ensembles of other cities, such as that of Szeged, Miskolc, Pécs and Debrecen. The Szegedi Szabadtéri Játékok (Szeged Open Air Festival) was first organized in 1931. Apart from a twenty year break, it has operated continuously up until today. Miskolc also organizes an opera festival since 2000, the program of which is usually related to Béla Bartók. One also needs to mention the seemingly less relevant music theatres. Following the bankruptcy of the People's Theatre, Rezső [Raoul] Mádér tried to keep the theatre as a kind of semi-operatic theatre, he established the first Hungarian theatre playing for a wider public. Although his People's Theatre-Comic Opera House could only survive for one season, even in this short period, it staged a Hungarian premiere (Domenico Monleone's *Cavalleria Rusticana*), with Béla Környei singing Turiddu. This piece was performed exclusively by this theatre in Budapest. The People's Opera, later City Theatre then Erkel Theatre was established in 1911. In the first few years, it could even rival the State Opera with its cheap tickets, yet notable guest performances, among them the Hungarian premiere of *Parsifal*. The history of the Opera and this latter theatre has intertwined more than once during the 20th century, they have been governed jointly by the Opera between 1921–1924, 1951–2007 and since 2012.

During World War II, artists who were forced to leave the company of the Opera, have joined to the OMIKE (Hungarian National Israelite Association for Public Culture), its operatic ensemble was the third one of that in Budapest of the period. OMIKE organized regular dramatic and operatic performances in the Goldmark-hall of the Pest Israelite Congregation. These performances were conducted by László Somogyi, Sándor Fischer and László Weiner, while Ilona Ladányi, Gabriella Relle, Dezső Ernster and Dávid Ney the younger were among those who were singing on this stage.

Despite the fact that in the academic year of 1908/1909, the Liszt Academy of Music launched a course of concert-singing, as an alternative to the already existing course of opera singing, singing *Lieder* and performing oratorios could actually not take roots in Hungarian music. At concerts in Budapest, however, opera singers were usually quite successful during the 20th century. Nowadays, the more intimate genres of songs and chamber music are represented less and less regularly on concerts in Hungary.

Conductors and Orchestras

The problematic question of staying in Hungary and of the parentage, which pervades the entirety of the history of Hungarian music in the 20th century, and which has been described

above, concerning singers, is even more pertaining to conductors. As we could see with regards to the Hungarian State Opera, conductors both Hungarian and foreign were present in the musical culture of the early 20th century Hungary. The case of Frigyes Reiner was however an example of a new era. As a disciple of Thomán, Bartók and Koessler at the Academy of Music, first he became the first opera conductor at the People's Opera. One of the most significant achievements of his youth in Hungary was the Hungarian premiere of *Parsifal*, which was conducted by him, in 1914. During the First World War, however, he signed a contract and went to Dresden, whence he moved to the United States. As the conductor of Chicago Symphony Orchestra, he has brought about one of the most glorious periods in the history of the orchestra. Similarly to Reiner, several Hungarian conductors have only become famous abroad (among them György Széll, Jenő Ormándy, Antal Doráti, György Solti, Ferenc Fricsay and István Kertész). In the interwar period, symphonic concerts in Budapest were conducted by Ernő Dohnányi, Jenő Hubay and later by János Ferencsik and György Lehel and the abovementioned conductors of the State Opera. Later, Albert Simon has shaped the orchestra of the Liszt Academy into an ensemble worthy of LP recordings. Following their studies and the beginning of their careers abroad, Ádám Fischer and Iván Fischer, two emblematic conductors of our age have also returned to Hungary. Similarly to foreign artists, it is also frequent among Hungarian performers, to turn toward conducting and accomplish outstanding results, after having been successful in playing an instrument. Tamás Vásáry, Zoltán Kocsis, András Keller, Zoltán Rácz, Gábor Takács-Nagy, and abroad András Schiff and the once world-famous director of the orchestra of the Mozarteum in Salzburg, András Végh are excellent examples of this tendency.

Among Hungarian orchestras, the Philharmonic Society has a particularly long history. It was founded in 1853. In its one and a half century long past, it had only nine director-conductors: Ferenc Erkel, Sándor Erkel, István Kerner, Ernő Dohnányi, János Ferencsik, András Kórodi, Erich Bergel and Ricco Sacconi. Since February 2011, its new head is Görgy Győriványi Ráth. The Székesfővárosi Zenekar (Budapest Capital Orchestra), which was organized in 1923, was first headed by Ferenc Fricsay, then by László Somogyi. Renamed to Állami Hangversenyzenekar (State Philharmonic Orchestra), it was presided over for decades by János Ferencsik from 1952. The orchestra is called today Nemzeti Filharmonikus Zenekar (Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra), and its chief conductor is Zoltán Kocsis. During his leadership, the orchestra has presented such illustrious pieces as Arnold Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* (finished by Kocsis himself), or the concert performances of the operas of Richard Strauss which have previously never been performed in Hungary. Moreover, they are presently producing a new CD-collection of Bartók's musical pieces (New Bartók Series). The orchestra of the Hungarian Radio was established in 1943 by Ernő Dohnányi. At the outset, it had thirty musicians. János Ferencsik re-organized that orchestra in 1945, with already fifty members. Among further conductors of the orchestra, György Lehel had acquired much merit in promoting contemporary classical music. He spent forty-three years at the Hungarian Radio, and during his thirty-nine years of leading the orchestra, he conducted two hundred and twenty pieces of fifty-eight Hungarian composers.

The Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar (Budapest Festival Orchestra), which was established in 1983 by Zoltán Kocsis and Iván Fischer, is also one of the most notable factors in present day concert culture in Hungary. At its very beginning, in line with its name, it was intended to play only at festive occasions, so as to elate musical life in Hungary with its performances. Shortly, however, they have become a permanent orchestra. The exceptional level of their performances brought about creating competition, from which the audience benefits the most. The success of the Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar is evidenced by the fact that in 2007, the

orchestra was elected by the critics of the international musical journal, *Gramophone*, to be among the ten leading symphonic orchestras of the world. Iván Fischer and his brother, Ádám Fischer aim at stirring up musical life in Hungary also by other means. They invite notable foreign performers to Budapest and urge Hungarian talents to perform on prestigious occasions. The former resulted in the organization of the Mahler-festival (2005–2012), while the latter helped creating the Budapest Wagner-days a musical festival in Budapest, ranking high even among international festivals.

Concerning music ensembles, one cannot disregard Hungarian traditions of chorus singing, which deserves its fame around the world. This tradition, elaborated by chorus-masters trained according to the principles of Kodály and his disciples, turned almost into a movement, and had its zenith in the decades following World War II. Similarly to that period, there are several exceptional youth choirs and chamber choirs in Hungary today, both on amateur and on a semi-professional level, with even a few professional ones among them.

It is also worth mentioning the wind ensembles from the k. u. k. military bands through mining orchestras to the symphonic bands. At the beginning of the 20th century, military bands often featured in theatres as symphonic orchestras. During the century, these wind ensembles have turned into symphonic bands playing and inspiring contemporary music, taking upon themselves the important duty of transmitting this type of music to their audience. The importance of amateur wind ensembles, which take in their repertoires original scores on a high standard and classical music arranged for these bands, is exceptional, because they impart classical music to an audience which otherwise would hardly encounter any such quality art.

A New Domain: Performing Early Music

Performing early music in Hungary started almost at the beginning of the 20th century. Although the Royal Hungarian Opera staged Gluck's *La cadi dupé* already in the first season, *Orfeo ed Euridice* was performed only in 1904, and the pastorale *Cythère assiégée* in 1913, works of the pre-classical era could only strenuously gain ground in the repertoire. The debut of *Cythère assiégée* and several successful performances of Mozart in the Opera is to be Sándor Hevesi, a director of far-reaching interests of producing. The premiere of Haydn's drama giocoso, *The Apothecary* in 1918, in the Medgyaszay Theatre was also directed by Hevesi. Händel's *Serse* and *Rodelinda*, Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* were all played in the Royal Hungarian Opera in the interwar period; the revival of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* in 1929 was a memorable success featuring Mária Basilides, Erzsébet Sándor and Gitta Halász. It is to be noted, however, that these operas reached the audience of the State Opera generally in later reorchestrations and adaptations.

The abovementioned series of historical concerts at the Zenede started on March 4 1922 with a passacaglia of Frescobaldi and the works of pre-classic composers, such as Janequin, Couperin, Krieger, Monteverdi, Rameau, Lassus, Palestrina and Lully. These concertos staged among others operas of Rameau, the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, extracts of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and the *Virginal Book of Lőcse*, but the performance of József Ruzitska's opera *Béla futása* was also considered similarly as historical. These concert series, which was organized annually by Emil Haraszti, lasted from 1922 to 1927, and featured musicians who taught either music history or the history of Hungarian music (János Hammerschlag, Imre Molnár, László Lajtha etc.).

Emil Lichtenberg, a notable person of the Hungarian oratorio performances, was active at the same time. As the founder of Budapest Singing and Orchestra Association, he was a pioneer of performing classical and pre-classical oratorios. With his books on music, he also contributed vastly to the education of Budapest's audience. Early music, however, remained in the first two thirds of the 20th century in the repertoire only of interested, researching performers. This is evidenced, for instance by the recording of *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* from 1955, in which the continuo was played by the musicologist Bence Szabolcsi, and the singers were Judit Sándor, László Nagypál and Endre Rösler. Early music performers after World War II were relatively late, if ever, in following the general international tendencies, therefore, they could be regarded rather as old-fashioned interpreters.

Meanwhile, nowadays one may experience an ever increasing popularity of the early music. There is an increasing number of ensembles which use original instruments or replicas, and – through the understanding and implementing of contemporaneous theoretical sources – aim at historically informed performances of classical and early music pieces. The first such Hungarian orchestra was the Capella Savaria established by Pál Németh in 1981 (and currently headed by Zsolt Kalló). The innovative projects of the orchestra were quite noticeable in the musical life of Hungary. György Vashegyi founded the Purcell Choir in 1990, and the Orfeo Orchestra in 1991. As the leader of the latter, he became one of the major protagonists of the early music movement in Hungary. Performing early music is still closely related to research. Thus, the research on the repertoires and the history of interpretation is done by the performers themselves (this was facilitated by the “First Recording” policy of the Hungaroton company, according to which, several pieces of music have been recorded and merchandised first from Hungarian performers). Moreover, researchers themselves often also perform (for instance, the fortepiano player and musicologist, Katalin Komlós). Although students graduating from the Department of Harpsichord and of Early Music at the Liszt Academy, form various ensembles and attempt to find their places in Hungarian musical life, it is reasonable to say that Hungary does not yet provide an adequate environment for general acclaim in this field. Therefore, several young Hungarian early music performers continue their studies at international academies and master courses, and search for employment abroad.

The Schola Hungarica which aims at performing Gregorian chant and its kindred, polyphonic compositions fits into the movement of performing early music somewhat differently. It has achieved an actual amalgamation of musicology and the art of performance. The choir was founded in 1969 by internationally renowned scholars of the study of Gregorian music (researchers of the Institute for Musicology at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, László Dobszay and Janka Szendrei), who were supported by Benjámín Rajeczky.

Performing Composers and Inspiring Performers – the Interpretation of Contemporary Music

At the end of the 19th century, Budapest was still considered as being a center of European Music. Therefore, it hosted several internationally acknowledged premieres, such as Brahms' *Piano Concerto No.2 in B-flat Major* (in 1881), the *Piano Trio No. 3. in C-minor* (in 1886), the *Violin Sonata No. 3 in D-minor* (in 1888) and the five movements version of Mahler's *Symphony No. 1* (in 1889). Contemporary operas reached Budapest reasonably quickly; one often had to wait only for a few months before the Budapest debuts of the operas of Mascagni, Leoncavallo, Puccini or Richard Strauss. While Károly Goldmark's only premiere

in Budapest, that of the *Götz von Berlichingen* did not amount to the years long success of the *Die Königin von Saba* in the Royal Hungarian Opera, the 1918 world premiere of *Bluebeard's Castle* and its subsequent revivals set quite a high standard. In the following years, almost not any Hungarian opera could beat its success. The most popular opera of the post World War II era was without doubt Sándor Szokolay's *Blood Wedding*. Besides that, the operas of Emil Petrovics (such as the *Lysistrata* and the *C'est la guerre*) could get wider publicity in Hungarian operatic culture.

During the 20th century, the characters of composer and performer have parted for good. In the first half of the century, the old ideal of an artist or conductor performing his or her own pieces could have a swan song, thanks to Béla Bartók, Ernő Dohnányi, Pál Kadosa, Sándor Veress and others. Meanwhile, in the second half of the century, one can encounter significantly less composers, who also perform on an instrument. Examples for this rare kind are György Kurtág, the composers of the New Music Studio, or Péter Eötvös, conducting his own works. This change is obviously related to the fact that the musical language of composers has changed. The technique of composing based on playing on instruments and improvisations have been gradually substituted by composing on the basis of abstract musical structures.

Those composers, who enjoy playing new music, shape not only Hungarian musical life, but by inspiring new pieces, they also shape the history of Hungarian music. The beginnings of the 20th century were characterized by the cooperation of Bartók and the Waldbauer-Kerpely String Quartet. Later on, the art of the disciples of Hubay, Sándor Végh, József Szigeti and Zoltán Székely have also triggered the birth of several musical pieces. The first Hungarian performer in the 20th century to combine the Hungarian cimbalom with contemporary music was Aladár Rácz (playing Stravinsky's *Ragtime*, *Circus Polka* and *Renard*). Later, through the activity of Márta Fábíán, Ágnes Szakály, Ildikó Vékony and further cimbalom players, this tendency has become a characteristic of Hungarian composing.

In the second half of the 20th century, due to the abovementioned activity of György Lehel, the orchestra the Hungarian Radio could play an essential role in propagating contemporary music. Several musicians took it to themselves to become the performers of contemporary pieces and, thus, to participate in its circulation. Such were the pianists Klára Körmendi, Ádám Fellegi, Lóránt Szűcs; the singers Erika Sziklay, Adrienne Csengery and Katalin Károlyi; the clarinetist Csaba Klenyán; the bassoonist György Lakatos (and their joint ensemble is the Trio Lignum); the flutist István Matuz, Gergely Matuz and Zoltán Gyöngyössi; the horn players Ferenc Tarjáni, Ádám Friedrich and Imre Magyarai; the organist Zsigmond Szathmáry; and from among the abovementioned musicians, Dénes Kovács, Eszter Perényi, Miklós Perényi, Zoltán Kocsis, András Keller; and the Liszt Ferenc Chamber Orchestra, Schola Hungarica, or nowadays, the Accord Quartet, just to mention a few.

There appeared in Hungarian musical culture several ensembles which focused exclusively on performing contemporary music. On the one hand, these ensembles have a fruitful cooperation with composers and, on the other hand, many of their members are composers themselves. Some examples to this are the Budapesti Kamaraegyüttes (Budapest Chamber Ensemble, 1968), the Új Zenei Stúdió (New Music Studio, 1970), the 180-as csoport (180 Group, 1979), the Intermoduláció Kamaraegyüttes (1985), the Componensemble (1989), the re-established UMZE Kamaraegyüttes (1997) or the THReNSeMBle (2008). A further important offshoot of contemporary Hungarian performance practice is the Amadinda

percussion group (1984), which plays both the traditional music of non-European cultures and contemporary pieces, some of which are composed by the members of the ensemble.

Musical Culture and Performances Today

The model of the “typical fate of 19th century Hungarian artists” is – according to the description provided by András Batta – the figure of Ede Reményi. Reményi started his career in Hungary, but went abroad soon, and returned to Hungary only after many years, already as a celebrated, world-famous guest. The musical culture in Hungary had three major sources both in the 19th and the first two thirds of the 20th century: musicians who stayed in Hungary, musicians who returned to Hungary, and foreign musicians who settled in Hungary.

Nowadays, renowned, foreign performers rarely choose Hungary as a residence. Thus, the presence of those performers, who regularly visit Budapest is all the more important. Such a returning guest was Sviatoslav Richter between 1958 and 1994, or Grigory Sokolov today. Their concerts are important events in the musical life of Hungary. Many young artists – and not only pianists – are influenced by their interpretations. Due to technological development, however, it is not only the artist, who travels at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century but his or her recordings as well. Hungarian musicians “study” interpretations by listening to records of exceptional performers, who visit the country only occasionally. Such artists are, for example, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, John Eliot Gariner, Pierre Boulez, Emmanuel Phaud, Maxim Vengerov and Evgeny Kissin.

And while nowadays the proportion of foreign artists settling down in Hungary is considerably smaller than before, it is more and more regular for Hungarian performers to move abroad. In the second half of the 20th century, many Hungarian musicians were forced to emigrate, due to political reasons. Some of them did not have a chance to return to Hungary, while others could not even leave Hungary. Since 1989, many young artists consider it a great opportunity to study abroad, or feel the need to try their luck in foreign countries. Thus, despite the fact that the media enables us to watch the newest premieres of the New York Metropolitan from the comfort of our own armchairs, it is increasingly difficult to keep track of what the young Hungarian performers are doing in our age. The technological development also causes a growth in the flow of information, and consequently, in the expectations of the audience. Therefore, an essential problem is that not only the audience expects musicians to be constantly present on high quality in the musical life, but it is also required of the artist to step on stage and succeed in prestigious international competitions already in a very young age, since these competitions act as a springboard for their careers.

To set the careers of the generation of young performers in motion, that is to say managing them, has always been a challenge. The great changes of the societal structure on the 20th century have brought about the almost total disappearance of personal patronage. Its duty in the second half of the century was assumed by the institution of the Philharmony. Nowadays, the latter provides stipends for newcomer artists (such as the Fischer Annie Scholarship for performers of classical music, the Kodály Zoltán scholarship for young composers and musicologists, and the Lakatos Ablakos Dezső Scholarship for jazz musicians). At the end of the century, talented musicians can gain recognition with the help of various prizes (Junior Prima Award), scholarships (“KLASSZ Tehetségek”) or through manager agencies (such as the Biro Music Management). Moreover, young performers are motivated to participate in international competitions of substantial size and significance, when it is promised that the winner would receive musical management for a few years following the competition.

The specialization of performers in Hungary has started in the last few decades of the 20th century. Nowadays, Hungarian artists tend to pick a style, determined by their talent and influenced by foreign performers, yet not irrespectively of the requirements of the market, and try to get acquainted with it, so as to be able to perform the works of the chosen composers at their best, and attempt to succeed in the musical life of Hungary. This phenomenon is not peculiar to Hungary. Due to the invention of sound recording and the ever increasing speed of change at the musical market, classical pieces in the end of the century can be listened to almost instantly. Moreover, traditions concerning the performance practice of these works have taken roots, and thus, it is significantly more difficult for young musicians to stand out with their repertoires. Although, we can still talk about universal musicians, it has become more usual for a performer to decide whether to dedicate his or her life to contemporary works or to play the pieces from the common repertoire, or perhaps to early music works.

Concert programs evolved accordingly. While in the second part of the century, classical and contemporaneous pieces dominated, the proportion of the latter has decreased significantly since then. Therefore, organizers of concerts try to maintain the popularity of contemporaneous music and that of early music with the organization of musical festivals (Mini Fesztivál, Földvári Napok, Savaria Régi Zene Műhely), while the Korunk Zenéje (Music of our Age), and the Early Music Days in Sopron and later Fertőd are organized by the Philharmony.

And while most of the time, the performances of world-famous, foreign artists are considered to be pinnacles in Hungarian musical life, it is certainly a development, that several, new and exceptional concert halls were bestowed to the Hungarian audience at the beginning of the 21st century. Besides the fancy concert hall of the Liszt Academy of Music, one can visit the Bartók Béla National Concert Hall in the Palace of Arts (2005), and the Kodály Centre in Pécs (2010). The refurbished Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music was opened for the public in October 2013, while the re-opening of the Erkel Theatre will provide an opportunity to renovate the State Opera as well. The Hungarian performing practice of the millennium is already presented by artists in these venues.

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Nagy magyar előadóművészek – Osváth Júlia. Hungaroton SLPX 11818. 1978.
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Magyar előadóművészek – Faragó György. Hungaroton LPX 12720
Magyar előadóművészek – Ferenczy György. Hungaroton LPX 12395-96
Magyar előadóművészek – Hernádi Lajos. Hungaroton LPX12203
Magyar előadóművészek – Ilosfalvy Róbert. Hungaroton LPX 12638. é. n.
Magyar előadóművészek – László Margit. Hungaroton LPX 12599. 1984.
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