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Changes in Aesthetical and Political Attitudes Toward Popular Music in the Rákosi-Era and the Early Kádárism (1948-1968)*Popular music in Hungarian musicology*

Research on jazz and popular music has long been part of Anglo-Saxon and German musicology. Moreover, theoretical knowledge concerning popular music genres and the history thereof is a fundamental part of the education at universities and academies of music. Although education in jazz, for example, has been present in Hungary for decades, there exists virtually no tradition of scholarly research and professional education in popular music in Hungarian musicology.

In the last four decades, a great number of books have been published on rock history, together with volumes of interviews and biographies. Thus, our knowledge concerning the history of popular music in the Kádár-era has evolved significantly. Yet, these publications – even those of them which were based on a wide range of sources – predominantly approach the events of Hungarian and international popular music only from the perspective of “fans”.¹ This topic, however, is a significant part of cultural history, moreover, it helps to better understand the public thinking of the era. Consequently, the topic deserves and demands to be analyzed according to the standards of historical studies and it is required that the relevant questions be answered accurately. In the second part of the 1960s, in an age when the state’s cultural policy was more lenient toward popular music than before, a handful of publications were written, mostly from a sociological background (some of them containing even musical analyses).² Additionally from the 1970s, surveys on the public taste concerning music were regularly taken, touching also on the Hungarian reception of jazz music.³ It is important to mention the work of János Maróthy, even if he, later on, failed to present his results in a comprehensive monograph.⁴ As a former associate of the Institute of Musicology, he was principally occupied with Marxist sociology and aesthetics of music. Nevertheless he and the research group he lead also investigated the topic of protest songs and beat music, resulting in a rich collection of sources. It is essential that the events of Hungarian popular music in the second half of the 20th century be presented in the to-be published 5th volume of *Magyarország zenei története* (Music History of Hungary) dealing with 20th century. The publication of this monograph-series is regarded as the major duty of the Institute of Musicology RCH HAS. But the research on popular music required for such a work is still in its infancy.

Up-to-date articles reflecting on western approaches have been published only in recent years in Hungary. Even these are predominantly focused on issues related to sociology and media studies⁵ or

¹ E.g. János Sebők: *Rock a vasfüggöny mögött*, Budapest: GM and acc., 2002, Béla Szilárd Jávorszky: *A magyar rock története*, Budapest: Népszabadság, 2005.

² E.g. Ágnes Losonczi: *A zene életének szociológiája : kinek, mikor, milyen zene kell?*, Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1969; Iván Vitányi: *„A könnyű műfaj”*, Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1965; Iván Vitányi (ed.): *Beat*, Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1969.

³ Attila Malecz: *A jazz Magyarországon*, Budapest: Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpont, 1981.

⁴ The legacy of János Maróthy is cared for by “Lendület” Archives and Research Group for 20th-21st Century Hungarian Music. In the institute, it was Katalin Kovalcsik, who conducted the most recent research on popular music, with a special interest on sociological and anthropological dimensions. As an external contributor, I have participated in the work of Kovalcsik more than once. (Cf. Katalin Kovalcsik: *Egy dunántúli falu zenei élete* [The Musical Life of a Village From Transdanubia], OTKA K 76875).

⁵ E.g. Tamás Tófalvy – Zoltán Kacsuk – Gábor Vályi (ed.): *Zenei hálózatok. Zene, műfajok, közösségek az online hálózatok és az átalakuló zeneipar korában*. Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2011.

political history.⁶ Works dealing with the aesthetical aspects of popular music and the relationship between aesthetics and the historical dimensions are still missing. This results in the disregard of viewpoints of music and musical aesthetics. However, I am convinced that in the case of popular music, an emphatically multi-disciplinary research is needed, in which the scholarly methods required for the analysis of such music is just as important as the likewise essential sketching of the societal background.

Aims and the background of research

The research attempted with the OTKA Postdoctoral grant is going to focus on the above mentioned aesthetical and musical aspects missing both from Hungarian musicology and from research on popular culture. It is, however, not only the novelty of the topic that makes it a groundbreaking research, but also the state-of-the-art methods to be implemented in the research. By harmonizing different disciplines and substituting the aspects of social history with those of art and the theory of arts, the research intends to draw a more nuanced picture of the chosen era than previous surveys. I orient myself along the standards of those recent, western publications in musicology, which think in terms of a complex web of art philosophy, philology and musical analysis.⁷

In the present research, this orientation means two things. Apart from a thorough musical analysis and research on the history of musical styles, it consists, on the one hand, of a study of the critical jargon established after the institutionalization of socialist realism, and an examination of its morphological and semantic changes. This, of course, necessitates a systematic work with the rich international literature dealing with Stalinism and Sovietization. On the other hand, it is equally important to conduct a general study of the Hungarian reception of Western mass culture. Moreover, a pre-requisite of the research is the exploration and classification of related archival material. Finally, the oral history collection in progress (the backbone of which are those life story interviews that I have conducted with the most important popular musicians of the era) should also be considered as an important collection of sources.

As an introduction to the present research, I have started to investigate the history of Hungarian popular music after World War II as a research fellow of Institute of Musicology RCH HAS, within the framework of *Lendület Archives and Research Group for 20th-21st Century Hungarian Music*. Besides necessary inquires in archival material and libraries, the work consisted of the preparation of material for further researches; applying for and receiving membership in the biggest international association of popular music at present⁸; the preparation of a database essential for further research⁹; the conducting of the above mentioned life story interviews¹⁰; and organizing a two days long nationwide conference on popular music in the Institute of Musicology, which took place between 31 January-1 February 2014.¹¹ The

⁶ E.g. Bence Csatóri: *A Kádár-rendszer könnyűzene-politikája*, PhD Dissertation, Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities, Budapest, 2008.

⁷ As far as progressive rock is concerned, e.g. Bernward Halbscheffel: *Progressive Rock – die ernste Musik der Rockmusik*, Leipzig: Halbscheffel, 2013, and especially: Edward Macan: *Rocking the Classics – English Progressive Rock and The Counterculture*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

⁸ This is the *International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM)*.

⁹ The constantly expanding database, made within the framework of the OTKA-Research (K 108 306) *Zeneélet Magyarországon a 20. században* (Musical Life in Hungary in the 20th Century) which contains several thousand records, is entitled *The Media Bibliography of Hungarian Popular Music (1945-1974)*. The database will be available at the homepage of the Archives for Hungarian Music.

¹⁰ So far, fourteen interviews have been conducted, with among others Levente Szörényi, Zorán Sztevanovity, Károly Frenreisz and members of the music band, Omega. The interviews are available at the homepage of the Archives for Hungarian Music (<http://zti.hu/mza/index.htm?m0703.htm>).

¹¹ *Könnyűzene – Könnyű zene? A magyar populáris zene a 20-21. században*, MTA BTK Zenetudományi Intézet. (http://zti.hu/mza/docs/Konnyuzene-program_20140131-0201.pdf)

contributions of this conference will be published in a collection of studies in the summer of 2015.¹²

So-far I have concentrated on five major topics. Firstly, I was interested in the display of popular music in contemporaneous youth magazines, and in the development of western popular media within the boundaries of socialism. I have published the results of my research in the 2013 winter issue of the journal *Médiakutató* and in a *Festschrift* celebrating the 70th birthday of Ágnes Erdélyi.¹³ Secondly, I was dealing with the visual representation of beat music in the discussed era, with a special emphasis on the first Hungarian beat movie from 1967 (*Ezek a fiatalok* [These Youngsters]). This subject, I presented at two prestigious, international conferences in Liverpool¹⁴ and in Kiel¹⁵ respectively. Then, I published my results in the journal *2000* in Hungarian¹⁶ and in the *Kieler Beiträge der Filmmusikforschung* in English.¹⁷ Thirdly, I surveyed the classical musical quotes in the Hungarian beat and rock music of the 60-70s. The results of these investigations have been presented, on the one hand, at nationwide conference on popular music, on the other hand, it will be published in English in the first 2015 issue of the journal *Hungarian Quarterly*.

After the above mentioned topics, mostly dealing with the 1960s, I have gradually started to acquaint myself with the popular music life of the Rákosi-Era. Since then, my attention has shifted, to questions concerning the changes of musical aesthetics and music policy resulting from the changes of personnel in the political elite in 1953 and in 1956. I also focus on the changes of directions in the '60s of those ideological frameworks, which had been created in Stalinism and early Kádárism. Thus, primarily, I dealt with the role of jazz in Hungarian youth policy. I presented my results during one of this year's most prominent conferences on jazz, *Growing Up: Jazz in Europe 1960-1980*,¹⁸ organized in Lucerne, Switzerland. The title of my presentation was *Ein Fenster zur klassischen Musik. Die Rolle des Jazz in der Jugendpolitik Ungarns (1961-1972)*. At this conference, I was requested by the editors of *European Journal of Musicology* to publish a more extensive study. Lately, I have been dealing with the issue of Hungarian national dance music in socialism. The idea of a more thorough elaboration of the topic popped up in relation to the theme of an international conference in Budapest in January 2015.¹⁹ The research question of this topic revolves around the seeming contradiction between the concepts of communism and nationalism. The points of reference for this research are the musical aesthetical debates of the 1950s about dance music that is 'Hungarian in form, socialist in content'. Following the conference in Budapest, in June 2015, I will present further results as a participant of the 18th Biennial IASPM Conference in Campinas, Brazil.

Topics of the research

The six topics, intended for the upcoming three years are certainly not independent from the research commenced in 2013. They are outlined with the expected results below.

¹² The volume, which I am editing, includes thirteen contributions and it is published by Rózsavölgyi és Társa Kiadó.

¹³ Ádám Ignác: *A populáris zene megítélésének változásai a kádári Magyarország ifjúsági sajtójában – az első 15 év (1957-1972)* [Changes in the Evaluation of Popular Music in the Hungarian Youth Media of Kádár-era - the first 15 years (1957-1972)], *Médiakutató*, 2013 winter, 7-17.; Ádám Ignác: „*Mondd meg, mit szeretsz!*”. *A kádári Magyarország első slágerlistái (1966-1968)* ["Tell me what you like!". The first pop charts of Kádár-era Hungary (1966-1968)], in: Zsuzsa Gáspár–Ádám Vér (ed.): *Tanulmányok Erdélyi Ágnes 70. születésnapjára*, Budapest: L' Harmattan, 2014 (under publication).

¹⁴ *Music since 1900. International Conference*, Liverpool Hope Univesrity, 11-15 September 2013.

¹⁵ *Play it again, Sam! The History, Theory and Practice of Songs in Film*. Christian Albrechts Universität zu Kiel, 26-27 February, 2014.

¹⁶ Ádám Ignác: *Ezek a fiatalok (1967)*. Az első magyar beatfilm szerepe a szocialista Magyarország könnyűzenei életében, *2000*, April 2014, 67-71.

¹⁷ Ádám Ignác: *Ezek a fiatalok*. The First Hungarian Beat Movie (1967), *Kieler Beiträge der Filmmusikforschung*, 2015 (to be published).

¹⁸ The conference was organized by the Jazz Department of Hochschule Luzern, between November 6-8, 2014.

¹⁹ *Nationalism in Music in the Totalitarian State*, Budapest, January 24-25, 2015

1. First of all, I wish to further elaborate on the topic of the national character and ‘Hungarianness’ of national dance music and popular music, which were so often expressed after the appearance of Western musical trends in Hungary. Moreover, I would like to investigate the exact meaning of global within the framework of ‘global and local’ for those trends of popular music that evolved within the socialist block. Also, I wish to find out whether the Soviet example had any general meaning, according to which national characteristics would have become decisive. The intended research discusses how authorities and the official cultural policy supported the creation of independent Hungarian dance and beat music, which occasionally even countered western tendencies. I attempt to cover the events of this story until the dawn of 1. Hungarian-speaking beat music (in 1968), sporadically featuring folk elements, such as Illés and Tolcsvay 2. References to the traditions of Bartók (quite frequent in the 1970s), and 3. in content the first truly nationalistic works (such as the suite *Honfoglalás* of P. Mobil in 1978). At the conference mentioned above and at the 2015 conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) I will deal primarily with the events of the 1950s. Later i will already cover governmental strategies for tackling Hungarian beat music in the 60s and 70s.

2. The second topic revolves around the aesthetic debates concerning the concept of jazz from the 1940s until the appearance of state-supported jazz in the middle of the 1960s. The research investigates how and with what actual tools jazz-like elements were supposed to be filtered out from popular music in the beginning of the 1950s. In order to achieve this aim, I will not only investigate the meetings of then censoring committees but also contemporary dance music pieces commissioned by the state as well as the first jazz recordings, produced after 1957. As a part of this inquiry, I will study the person of János Maróthy, one of the most important ideologists of popular music in the era. His discourses on jazz and popular music will be the topic of a presentation and an article in the first year.

3. One of the crucial questions of post-1956 Hungarian history is how much the Kádár-regime had inherited from the ideology of pre-1956 Stalinist regime, and how much was it forced to reform and change. A prominent expert of the period, Melinda Kalmár argues that the focus of the new governmental ideology and cultural policy was less aimed at literature and art than media and policy.²⁰ It remains to be investigated, however, how this significant transformation and changes in foreign policy affected the profile of musicology in general. Presenting the changes in the musicological discourse and in the institutional structure is one of the crucial points of my research.

4. One of the most important decisions of the Kádár-era concerning popular music, the resolution of the Communist Youth Association (KISZ) on the appropriate utilization of leisure time from 1964 dates back only two years after the emancipation of jazz.²¹ This document was the first sign of the intent of political and cultural authorities to integrate western tendencies of dance music into socialist culture. Through this predominantly historical research and on the basis of archival documents, I will attempt to reconstruct the circumstances in which this document was produced. I will examine the debates of politicians and ideologists and all further regulations related to the resolution (such as the initiatives to develop social dance education and youth magazines).

5. The KISZ-resolution from 1964 clearly indicated that, however slowly, beat music will eventually be accepted into Hungarian publicity. The period between 1965 and 1969 was clearly the peak in the history of Hungarian beat music. In this era, beat music was not only vaguely restrained or criticized, but

²⁰ See Melinda Kalmár: *Történelmi galaxisok vonzásában. Magyarország és a szovjetrendszer 1945-1990*, Budapest: Osiris, 2014.

²¹ Cf. MNL M-KS 288. f. 35/1964 8.

it was even occasionally integrated by the authorities into socialist culture by the positive discrimination of those bands which best befitted official standpoints. This opening resulted in a growth of legally available information on Western popular music, even if it did not mean that similarly to their Western counterparts, the Hungarian youth would have been well informed about the events of popular music. But previously, those interested could only learn about beat and rock music from poorly audible broadcasts of foreign radio stations, from the sound recordings and media coverage imported by the privileged and from repertoires of the first bands playing only covers. With the additional help of the abovementioned life story interviews, my research investigates these early period. It analyzes how much concerts of amateur bands could serve as substitutes for sound recordings and how much the lyrics and melodies of songs from the foreign repertoire were adjusted and transformed by Hungarian beat music bands.

6. As I mentioned above, beat music was enveloped by a more democratic atmosphere after 1965, which resulted in the making of the first Hungarian beat-movie, *Ezek a fiatalok* (These Youngsters). Since I have thoroughly analyzed this movie in 2013, I will focus on its “sequel” the documentary-like production of András Kovács, from 1969, entitled *Extázis 7-től 10-ig* (Ecstasy from 7 to 10) and the contemporaneous aesthetical debates concerning ecstasy and roaring.

Apart from the above topics, I was requested by editor Ewa Mazierska, professor of the University of Central Lancashire, to write a book chapter dealing with popular music in Hungary in state socialism. The book chapter will be part of the volume *Popular Music in Eastern Europe*. The volume itself will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in the second half of 2016. The editor is interested primarily, in the aesthetical and political construction of Hungarian popular music life and the interrelation of these two. Therefore, in the second year of the OTKA post-doctoral research, I aim at producing a study about this topic. This study would introduce the popular music of '50-60s Hungary to a wider, international audience.

It is of course essential to continue conducting interviews. Henceforward, I intend to record five interviews per year among others with Gábor Presser, Anna Adamis, Szabolcs Szörényi, Győző Brunner, László Pataki and József Laux. Along with the major trajectory of the research, these interviews will focus on musical-aesthetical problems. Each of them requires two months of preparation and cover approximately 2 hours of discussion.

It is part of the research plan to develop the above mentioned database on media bibliography of Hungarian popular music (between 1948-1975) and a new database concerning the popular musical recordings,²² which – together with a search engine – will foster the thematic works of all researchers of Hungarian popular music. Producing a complete database by this time is (even with help from outside) obviously impossible. Nevertheless I intend to create a database that can subsequently be developed. At this first stage of the work, I prefer to collect the relevant articles from musical journals (e.g. *Muzsika*, *Magyar Zene*, *Új Zenei Szemle*) and thematic weeklies and monthlies (such as *Ifjúsági Magazin*, *Magyar Ifjúság*, *Világ Ifjúsága*, *Valóság*).

Encouraged by the success of the conference on popular music, which took place in January last year, I would like to organize two further conferences in the autumn of 2015 and the winter of 2017 respectively. The first one will deal with state-supported popular music, while the latter may focus on the effects of technical development on popular music and jazz.

²² *Beat- és rockzenei felvételek Magyarországon* (Beat- and rock recordings in Hungary). The database will be available at the homepage of the Archives for Hungarian Music.

Research schedule

September 2015 – August 2016

- Publishing a written version of the paper presented at the international conference Growing Up: Jazz in Europe (1960-1980) in Lucerne, Switzerland. The paper is entitled *Ein Fenster zur klassischen Musik. Die Rolle des Jazz in der Jugendpolitik Ungarns (1961-1972)* and will be published in German in the *European Journal of Musicology* (30000 characters).
- Publishing a study in the volume *Made in Hungary*, edited by Routledge. The title of the paper will be „Hungarian in form, socialist in content”. *The Concept of The Hungarian National Dance Music in the Rákosi Era* (40000 characters).
- Presenting a paper at the conference *Musical Legacies of State Socialism: Revisiting the Narratives about Post–World War II Europe* in Belgrade. The proposed title of the paper is *János Maróthy and the Popular Musical Legacy of the Socialist Realism*.
- Publishing a study about this topic in English. (30000 characters).
- Organizing the nationwide musicological conference 'Canonization and Supporting in the Hungarian Popular Music Scene' and presenting a paper: State-funded dance music composing classes in Hungary in the 50s.
- A one week long research trip in Oxford and Liverpool.²³
- Conducting and publishing five life story interviews on the homepage of the research group.

September 2016 – August 2017

- Writing a book chapter to be published by Palgrave Macmillan's *Popular Music in Eastern Europe*. The chapter deals with popular music in Hungary in state-socialism, and I was requested to write it by Ewa Mazierska, professor of the University of Central Lancashire.
- Writing an article with the working title *Állami megrendelésre készült tánczenék az ötvenes években* [Dance music pieces commissioned by the state in the 1950s]. The article is to be published in *2000* (30000 characters).
- Presenting a paper at the annual conference of the Hungarian Musicological Society, together with the publication of an article in *Múltunk*, entitled *Hogyan töltsük helyesen a szabadidőt? Egy 1964-es KISZ-határozat keletkezéséről* [How to Spend Leisure Time Appropriately? On The Origins of a Resolution of the Hungarian Communist Youth Association From 1964] (40000 characters).
- Application to an international conference with the work-in-progress, comprehensive paper: *The question of national characteristics of popular music in Hungary(1948-1978)*.
- A one week long research trip in the libraries and state archives of Berlin and Leipzig, Germany.
- Conducting and publishing five life story interviews on the homepage of the research group.

September 2017 – August 2018

- Writing an article entitled *Kommunista ideológia és zenetudomány* [Communist ideology and Musicology] to be published in *Korall* (30000 characters)

²³ The planned research trips to the U.K. and to Germany and Russia aim, first of all, at collecting material in archives and getting acquainted with the most recent specialist literature.

- Applying for an international conference to present the results of my research concerning this topic.
- Preparing the conference paper for publication in an international journal with the title *The Early Period of the Hungarian Beat* (40000 characters).
- Organizing a nationwide musicological conference on the effects of technical development on popular music in Hungary.
- Completion the databases *A magyar populáris zene sajtó-bibliográfiája* (The Media Bibliography of the Hungarian Popular Music) and *Beat- és rockzenei felvételek Magyarországon* (Beat- and rock recordings in Hungary) together with publishing an article on the creation of the databaseses and on the principles of collection at the homepage of the *'Lendület'* research group (10000 characters).
- A ten day long research trip in Moscow, surveying the Russian State Library and the archives.

Infrastructure needed

1. Since foreign literature necessitated by the research is only scarcely accessible in Hungarian libraries, it is necessary to financing planned research trips and conference participations, including travel costs (plane tickets or fuel costs, costs of accommodation and of local public transportation), registration and participation fees and daily allowances.
2. The research requires state of the art electronic devices: a quality laptop with components and a printer.