

BOOK REVIEW

AN EXCEPTIONAL EDITORIAL RELEASE: A TRIBUTE TO GYÖRGY LIGETI IN HIS NATIVE TRANSYLVANIA

The volume *A Tribute to György Ligeti in His Native Transylvania* (nos. 1-2) is quite an event in Romanian musicology. Edited by distinguished musicologists Bianca Țiplea Temeș and Kofi Agawu, the volume enjoys the contribution of fifteen researchers from various cultures, schools, and generations – in keeping with multicultural Transylvania, Ligeti's place of origin. The idea to pay him homage in Cluj-Napoca, the very city the composer studied in between 1941-43, was Bianca Țiplea Temeș', the musicologist and professor at the "Gheorghe Dima" National Academy of Music, founder and director of the festival "A Tribute to György Ligeti in His Native Transylvania" whose first edition in 2006 marked the composer's 10th death anniversary.

The volume joins papers presented on the conferences hosted by the festival in 2016 and 2018, and the binary structuration, with each part bearing the title of the corresponding conference, offers a clear image of the two events.

The first part, "Ligeti's Legacy in Retrospect", brings together six studies highlighting the defining elements of his notion of music writing and of his compositional style.

Wolfgang Marx, keynote speaker of the first conference and one of the most authoritative voices in the field, builds up his essay from the contradiction between the composer's statement that "a composer should [...] not talk too much" and the multitude of writings, interviews, radio shows etc. constant throughout Ligeti's career. Searching for the motivation at the basis of this word-based intense activity, the musicologist identifies three answers: 1. the need to ensure a quasi-constant income, particularly during the period between leaving Hungary (1956) and obtaining a safe position in Germany (1973); 2. the need to shape the talk on contemporary aesthetic tendencies according to his own views; 3. the opportunity to facilitate the knowledge and circulation of his music. Marx reveals that Ligeti knew how to find terms which contributed to defining his music ("micropolyphony", for instance) or how to draw connections to suggestive autobiographical episodes (instead of employing the abstract concepts favored by some of his colleagues). The essay, a demonstration of clear ideas and virtuosic argumentation, is inciting, polemic, and captivating.

Another celebrated Ligeti scholar, Julia Heimerdinger, aims to crack the reason for the success of one of the composer's famous works: *Atmosphères*. In establishing the traits that would explain its popularity, two analyses focusing on different fields, pop music and new music, serve as guiding thread. With her choice of case study, Heimerdinger proves that these criteria transgress music genres, operating as a sort of Procrustean bed, of public perception. Among the eleven particularities she identified in *Atmosphères* rank the musical-historic relevance, the attractive sonority, the relatively short duration, the presence of emotion, of a perceptible form, of extra-musical connotations etc.

The way Ligeti employs timbre to structure sound material is Michael Searby's theme. He begins by underlining such filiations as the influence of serialist logic in the individualized treatment of sound parameters or the contact with electronic music at the Cologne studio. The discourse then arches starting following composer's own confession that in the works after *Atmosphères* "tone-colors no longer have predominance in articulating the form" (pg. 46). Wanting to prove their ongoing utilization, but aware of the difficulties of objectivation in the analysis of the most volatile (or subjective) parameter, the researcher progresses with caution, selecting some edifying examples. The result of the analysis is both nuancing and validating Ligeti's statement.

With a double degree, in mathematics and music, Amalia Szücs-Blănaru chooses two works (*Poème symphonique pour 100 métronomes*, 1962 and *Continuum*, 1968) to illustrate Ligeti's mathematical, intuitive mind. The graphical representation of non-retro-gradable rhythmic structures resulted from superimposed different equal pulsations constitutes an irrefutable image of the order paradoxically hiding behind the disorder in *Poème symphonique* in a way that, I would argue, takes Messiaen's similar technique to the extreme, while the manner the ostinatos are superposed in *Continuum* sends to American minimalism phasing. The association of such sound typologies with the chaos theory, summarized by Lorenz and Mandelbrot during the same period, is yet another proof of the zeitgeist.

The oeuvre of Ligeti, a true "citizen of the world" as he describes himself, is a space where multiple influences cohabit and intersect. As one of his students (1974-79), Manfred Stahnke offers stimulating detail on the composer's interest in Harry Partch's 43-tone scale. Colloquial reports (from which we learn that Ligeti described microtonal clashes as "the Partch effect") and painstaking analyses are the foundation that the researcher erects to demonstrate that the American composer's concepts influenced Ligeti in such works as *Passacaglia ungherese* or *Hamburg Concerto*.

The first part of the volume concludes with Cornel Țăranu's confessional essay drafting the image of Ligeti, the musician and the man, as the eminent Cluj-born composer knew him during their meetings in Darmstadt (the 1970s) and Aix-en-Provence (1978), but also via the indirect contacts occasioned by later events.

It is touching to learn that, after more than five decades since his expulsion from the Cluj Conservatoire by the Horthyist rule, the author of *Concert românesc pentru orchestră* [Romanian Concerto for Orchestra] and of *Columna infinita* [The Endless Column] became, in 1997, on the proposal of academicians Ștefan Niculescu and Cornel Țăranu, honorary member of the Romanian Academy.

* * *

The second part builds bridges across different continents and cultures. The first six studies are published under the title “Ligeti: A Portrait with Reich and Riley”, inspired by one of the composer’s works, *Self-portrait with Reich and Riley (with Chopin in the background)*/Selbsportrait mit Reich und Riley (und Chopin ist auch dabei). Of course, this section aims to reveal some elective affinities in their oeuvre. But Kofi Agawu, keynote speaker of the second conference, goes further, and chooses a more tender territory, where non-nuancing and labelling can lead to distortions and deforming generalizations: the filiations between African traditional music and the oeuvre of Ligeti and of Reich. The researcher takes the two composers’ comments on the congruencies between African music and their own output and compares Ligeti and Reich excerpts with examples of African traditional or contemporary art music. With the authority of the scholar and the acuity and spirit of the critic, Agawu locates similarities and differences, guiding us in better understanding the way these musical worlds intersect.

In his study, Pierre Michel aims to trace parallels between Ligeti’s, Reich’s, and Riley’s ideas and compositional techniques. Works by Ligeti (especially those from 1973-76, before his 1972 visit to California) and by the two American composers (written both before and after this period) are considered. The comparative analysis leads to the identification of some similarities as regards repetitive melodic pattern, phase shifting, texture integration, simple-complex periodicity, the transposition of electronic music techniques in instrumental music etc. All this can naturally point to not only a circulation of ideas in both directions, but also to a more complex process of borrowing and adapting ideas and processes from various sources (we can for instance think about Stravinsky’s *ostinatos*, Messiaen’s rhythmical complexities, Boulez’s particular types of rests etc.) whose exact identification is extremely difficult.

The discussion is continued in *Codes, Constraints, and the Loss of Control in Ligeti’s Keyboard Works* by Amy Bauer, who remarks on the heavy use of repetitive patterns in some of Ligeti’s works from the early 1960s and which “seems to prefigure [...] forms of American minimalist practice” (pg. 161). The delimitation of a territory common to Ligeti, Reich, and Riley, originating in the confluence between technology (and the idea of mechanical evolution) and certain Oriental/non-Western influences, is done with circumspection, the researcher drawing attention to the distance separating the respective sound-worlds. To support this distinction, those of Ligeti’s works for keyboard instruments

built based on certain algorithms (a constant practice with him) are divided by Bauer into two categories: 1. works with the generating algorithm revealed as well as exhausted by its musical reflection; 2. works that, the used algorithms aside, lead to unpredictable and contradictory musical results. At the end of this journey based both on the analysis of the musical text and the receiver-performer's perception, the researcher draws a fine but clear demarcation line: "Unlike those processes that control the early music of Reich and Riley, Ligeti's algorithmic constraints are neither subsumed by nor equal to their form" (pg. 174).

Young Vlad Văidean approaches a theme fascinating as it is controversial – overlaps and differences between music and the spoken language. Backed by a solid and diverse bibliography, he visits extra-musical territories (sociology, psychology, biology, neurology), presenting a succinct, clear, and well-documented essay on older and newer theories as well as some forms of the relation "intonation – rhythm", the common nucleus of music and language. The existence, in Reich's works from the 1960s, of repetitive patterns using pre-recorded voices is seen by Văidean as an intuition of a phenomenon to be proved only in 2011 in a study by Diana Deutsch – the musicalization of a text through reiteration, music becoming even a "metaphor of speech" (pg. 202).

Manfred Stahnke's second essay has a polemic and suggestive start, as it is almost oxymoronically called "Ligeti's Maximal Music" (the "minimal – maximal" paradox, albeit implicit, being rather evident in the context of the discussion on the ties between Ligeti, Reich, and Riley). The diversity of ideas and influences discernible in Ligeti's works was already insisted upon by the previous authors, and the many musical allusions from various eras and cultures have already been noticed both by Stahnke and by other researchers. But Stahnke proposes now another view on the composer, namely, Ligeti as influenced by visual suggestions ("Ligeti always had pictures in mind while composing", pg. 219). He makes out his case with Ligeti's last etudes for piano, dedicated to mathematician Heinz-Otto Peitgen and to painter Fabienne Wyler, respectively. Stahnke offers in-depth, subtle details on the possible connections and intersections between the aural and the visual plane. And Peitgen's painting, dedicated to the composer and called *Ligeti-Fractal*, is particularly touching by its beauty and symbolistic.

The phrase "Something in the Air", the incipit of Heidi Zimmermann's title, is a veritable corollary of the ideas presented in this second part of the volume. Starting from two writings by Ligeti and Reich where each speaks highly of the other, she looks comparatively at two similar works, Ligeti's *Poème symphonique* and Reich's *Pendulum Music*. The emphasis is not on determining any influence whatsoever under the form of a univocal relation, but rather on remarking on the similarities and differences between the two pieces. The study can be considered a demonstration of the validity of Ligeti's words: "new techniques are, so to speak, *in the air*" (pg. 226).

Inspired by the last words of Ligeti's title ("...auch dabei"), the second section of this part proposes, as in a final development, the expansion of the same idea – the similarities between different artistic worlds.

Felix Meyer's theme is the meeting between Ligeti and Nancarrow, a real "collision" due to the various effects it has on their subsequent compositional itinerary. Meyer begins by making rough drawings of the composers during the period leading up to that meeting: Ligeti was experiencing writer's block after *Le Grand macabre*, and Nancarrow was an isolated, unknown composer, penning in solitude particularly complex works for mechanical piano. The change that occurred only a couple of years later is bewildering. Meyer captures the mutual transformation process in the inspired opening phrase, "Dr Seek and Mr. Hyde", a symbiosis between the suspense associated with the name of the children's game, the title of Stevenson's novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Anthony O'Neill's later version, *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Seek*.

The final three essays address from three different perspectives the theme of the multiple forms of minimalism. Composers writing after 1960 could turn to it, but this movement was, as Anca-Daniela Mișu shows us, manifest in theatre too, marking the entire 20th century. The need to revitalize materialized to essentialize by eliminating all exterior artifice, the stage only retaining basic elements – lights, music, minimalist elements which render space "rhythmic". The drastic cutback in set, costumes etc., considered useless and cumbersome, resulted in theatre refocusing not only on the human actor, but on the quest for meaning, for transcendence, theatrical performances thus returning to their ancient, original function.

Anna Dalos' study, *Minimalism and Popularity in Hungary in the 1980: Group 180*, is as much a musicological as it is a sociological radiography of the arrival and development of minimalism in an Eastern European country. The inclusion in the title of the name of a new music ensemble is no accident: such ensembles were the driving force in promoting and popularizing new music in general (New Music Studio, 1972) and minimalist music in particular (Group 180, 1979), most members being performers as well as composers. Dalos notices how the differences between the two groups reflected on both their oeuvre and their audience. The evolution of minimalist approaches and their increased diversity over time are highlighted, the author arguing that this individualization process translates above all in a Europeanization accomplished both by incorporating elements of Hungarian folklore and by integrating suggestions of Western music of other eras, the two composers being thus close to postmodern aesthetics.

Bianca Țiplea Temeș builds her investigation of Romanian minimalism with a refined sense of the dramatic, in a form reminiscent of the question-and-answer musical pattern. In the first, interrogative, part, "Out of the Loop?", she outlines the political-ideological context in contemporary Romania, different from that of its bordering country (despite the proximity) in the force of the repressive rule. Țiplea Temeș underlines the way political pressure caused Romanian

composers to resist the simplicity imposed by the Communist party and which they associated with ideologized music. As the researcher remarks, this very tension between simplicity and complexity would engender in our country a particular form of minimalism right at the beginning of the 1960s, when the American movement was not yet locally known. Romanian minimalism is inspired by archaic, ritual or children's folklore practices, the simplicity seen rather as the result of an initiatory process of distilling and essentializing complexity. In the final cadenza, the argumentative itinerary crystalizes in the answer to the initial question – through such composers as Mihai Moldovan, Liviu Glodeanu and Corneliu Dan Georgescu Romanian music is, too, “in the minimalist loop” (p. 295).

Finally, I wish to emphasize the exceptional quality of the scientific committee (Nicholas Cook, Michael Searby, Heidi Zimmermann, Amy Bauer, Violeta Dinescu, Keith Potter, László Vikárius, Adrian Pop), the accuracy of the English texts due to Ariana Phillips-Hutton's (University of Cambridge) editorial support, and the inspired and expressive artwork (cover and illustrations) by Bencze Miklós.

The volume impresses with its substantiality, high academic level, novelty, relevance, and diversity of perspectives, arched on three concentric circles, or rather on three volutes configuring the defining traits of Ligetian thought and compositional technique, ties with other worlds, sonic or otherwise (influences and sources of inspiration drawn from music, the fine arts, mathematics etc.) and congruencies with different tendencies or movements guided by a certain zeitgeist. I am convinced that this volume will be a dependable bibliographic source for researchers of Ligeti's oeuvre, and not only for them.

In my attempt to paint the image of this ample and diverse volume (and to get as many readers interested in it as possible) I chose to make a summary of each contribution. But this editorial release is like an archipelago, composed of sixteen islands, distinct but sharing multiple, unlimited ties: addenda, nuances, questionings, shifts of perspective, new ideas etc. And so, we can say that, with the conclusion of a first reading, the journey just begins...

OLGUȚA LUPU²

English version: Maria Monica Bojin

² *Dean of the Faculty for Composition, Musicology and Music Education, National University of Music Bucharest. E-mail: olgotalupu@gmail.com*