

SCRIABIN AND KODÁLY IN THE READING OF ANTAL MOLNÁR, IMRE MOLNÁR AND EMIL HARASZTI¹

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*"(Scriabin) is not among the pioneering greats."*³
(Kodály)

SUMMARY. This study examines how Kodály, his student Antal Molnár and his colleague Imre Molnár, and their adversary Emil Haraszi saw Scriabin's music throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Audiences were responsive, as seen by the continuous performance of his works by Hungarian and international musicians beginning in 1906. There was a great deal of curiosity in his orchestral pieces, but only four of them were played ten times throughout the course of a century. *Réverie* and *Le Poème Divin* debuted in Budapest in 1910, followed by *Le Poème de l'extase* in 1919, although *Prometheus* did not make its appearance until 2001. Kodály found his music peculiar and disinteresting, judging it to be a poorer disciple of Richard Strauss and Claude Debussy. However, following the composer's death, his pupils discovered new values in him, characterizing him as mythical (like A. Molnár A.) and mystical (like I. Molnár). And Haraszi thought it was excellent music. A different interpretation referred to Scriabin as the "Russian Bartók." He was regarded as "one of the most inventive experimenters of his time," which was a mixed acclaim. After 1945, newspapers mostly complimented his piano

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³ Kodály Zoltán. "X. filharmóniai hangverseny" [10th Philharmonic Concert], In *Pesti Napló*, 11. March 1919, p. 6.



pieces and symphony conductors. Marxist aesthetes after 1949 saw his work as a failure due to his spiritual goals, which A. Molnár regarded as a distinctive value. Two pioneering conductors, who considered Kodály their distant teacher, Z. Kocsis and A. Ertüngenalp, gave the first performances of his hitherto unperformed pieces after 1990.

Keywords: Kodaly, Scriabin, Antal Molnár, Imre Molnár, Emil Haraszti, impressionism, ecstasy

Kodály and Scriabin

This paper investigated Alexander Scriabin's reception in Hungary throughout the first half of the 20th century from the perspectives of three critics: Antal Molnár (1890 - 1983), Imre Molnár (1888 – 1977) and Emil Haraszti (1885 – 1958). They have close ties to Kodaly; the first two are his spiritual allies, while the third is an antagonist. In addition to Beethoven, Liszt, and Wagner, the most significant references for the reviewers were their own Hungarian contemporaries, particularly Béla Bartók (1881-1945) and Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967). Bartók was not influenced by the Russian composer, and he rarely performed his compositions. Neither did he hold an unfavorable view of him. However, Kodály did. Only twice in his life did he jot down his senior Russian colleague's name.⁴ On no time did he demonstrate comprehension. While the Master's sophisticated taste had identified worth in the music of many obscure composers (such as Robert Volkmann, 1815 – 1883), he had not found it in Scriabin's compositions. He detected the strong impressionism of Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918) and the symphonic influence of Richard Strauss (1864 – 1949) in the style of the Russian composer. He vehemently opposed them. The paradox is that, when Kodály listened to Scriabin's compositions, he was still profoundly inspired by impressionism (it had been absorbed up to the *Psalmus hungaricus*, 1923) and yearned for symphonic influence (Richard Strauss was a thorn in his side anyway). While he attempted to reject the influence of another Russian composer, Igor Stravinsky (1882 – 1970), by not completing any of his ballets and removing the *Dragon Dance*

⁴ Kodály first names Scriabin in the paper cited above (Kodaly, 1919), and then again among Russian composers who did not employ folk music. Kodály Zoltán. "A népdal szerepe az orosz és a magyar zeneművészetben, előadás". (*The Role of Folk Song in Russian and Hungarian Music*, lecture, 07. July 1946). In Kodály Zoltán. *Visszatekintés (Retrospect)*. Edited by Bónis Ferenc. Argumentum, Budapest, 2007. 1st book, p. 185.

(an episode from the original Act IV of the play *Háry János*, 1925), he defended himself against Scriabin with strong words. In the turn of Kodály's style circa 1920, while not by name, the mystic Russian influence is clear, particularly in the direction he should not pursue. As a composer, he desired pure forms (if not academicism), a sound that adhered to emotional logic (rather than sound painting), and ethically uplifting emotions. He did not locate these components in the music of Scriabin.

One of Kodály's closest friend was Antal Molnár, the pioneer of Hungarian music sociology, a musician, composer, and a lecturer at the Academy of Music from 1919 to 1959.⁵ He was the first to teach solfège and to compile a collection of folk music samples. He shared Kodály's perspectives on music and morality, music and artistic evolution, and music and the public (society in the broader sense). In his studies on music, he included sociology, history, literature, and acoustics. In his analysis of each piece of music, he has considered three aspects: melodic inspiration, harmonic concept, and moral dimension. Molnár first conceived in terms of a positivist aesthetic system, and afterwards in terms of an intellectual-historical aesthetic system, therefore considerably advancing Hungarian music historiography. After 1949 (under the communist government), his theoretical work was not valued, but his work in music history was recognized.

Kodály's important colleague in the singing educational concept was Imre Molnár, the first significant Hungarian musical phonetics researcher.⁶ He was a librarian researcher who collaborated with the renowned communist librarian Ervin Szabó (1877 – 1918) at the Metropolitan Library (now the Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library). He also taught at the National Music Conservatory. He was named school principal under the first Hungarian Communist Dictatorship but was afterwards ousted after the fall of dictatorship. In 1922, he was once again granted permission to instruct, first at the National Conservatory until 1933, and subsequently at the Music Academy until 1959. As a result of his early studies into the phonetics of Hungarian language and music, he was appointed director of vocal teacher training at the Music Academy. His most significant publication is *Eufonetika a szép beszéd és éneklés tana* (Euphonetics: The Doctrine of Beautiful Speech and Singing, 1942). From the beginning, he has been a radio contributor, teaching mostly

⁵ Windhager Ákos. "Utóhang. A valódi szerelem, avagy gondolatok Molnár Antal hallgatása közben". [Afterword. True love, or thoughts awakened while reading the essays of Antal Molnár]. In MOLNÁR Antal. *A zeneesztétika feladata (The Task of Music Aesthetics)*, Edited by Demeter Tamás and Windhager Ákos, MMA Kiadó, Budapest, 2022, p. 440.

⁶ Schelken Pálma. Egy zenetudós halálára (The Death of a Musicologist). In *Parlando*, 1978/2, p. 30.

pronunciation to broadcasters and creating fifty programmes. As Kodály's colleague, he was instrumental in reviving the training of Hungarian singers and singing teachers. The way he perceived Bartók, Kodály, and even Scriabin demonstrates his sensitivity to current music.

Scriabin's Hungarian musicologist admirer was Emil Haraszti, who served as the National Music Conservatory's (Nemzeti Zenede) director from 1918 until 1927. He attained this post through leftist political maneuvering. During the (first) Hungarian communist government (March–August 1919), he maintained his post and sometimes addressed the cultural and political leadership. His body of work is still contentious.⁷ According to a recent book, his musicology expertise was inadequate, but his (debatable) conservatism and nationalism are cited as his flaws. The fact that neither Kodály nor Bartók loved his work diminishes the estimation of him among music historians in retrospect. In 1913, he penned a scathing assessment of Bartók, but in 1930, he dedicated a complimentary short monograph to the composer, which was angrily rejected by him.⁸ In order to foster a more favorable French image of Hungary in the 1920s, Haraszti became engaged in French-language journalism and became the editor of the *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie*. He relocated to Paris in 1927, where he resided until his death. Since he was a youth, he had been intrigued in Debussy, and even had an accident 'connected' to the French composer (he was looking at Debussy scores in a Paris bookshop window when he was hit by a car in 1925). Haraszti had a strong interest in the music of his own era, which he studied in depth. In contrast to contemporaries such as Kodály, he admired Scriabin's impressionism.

Therefore, conceptions that could seem laughable now were articulated with a dedication to modernity, a high degree of openness to the works, and a broad level of competence. The three of them had a distinct aesthetic horizon. They evaluated three things: the indications of genius, the inventiveness of the composing methods, and the critics' personal opinions of the pieces' impressionist characters. Their standard for brilliance and originality was Liszt, Bartók and Kodály. Because of this, I can add a little humor. They gave Scriabin a very Hungarian interpretation: if his compositions made reviewers think of Bartók (or Kodály), they adored him; if not, they didn't.

⁷ Ozsvárt Viktória. *Francia kapcsolat. Haraszti Emil (1885 – 1958) pályaképe (The French Connection – Emil Haraszti's Career)*, Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont – Zenetudományi Intézet, Budapest, 2022, p. 6.

⁸ Bartók, Béla's letter to Octavian Beu, 20. January 1931. In *Bartók Béla levelei (Béla Bartók's Letters)*. Edited by Demény János. Zeneműkiadó, Budapest, 1976, p. 397.

The Hungarian reception of Scriabin before the Second World War

Scriabin has received very little reception in Hungary, and thus has he remained a stranger to the Hungarian public for the last 100 years. We will see that only in the short period between the two world wars did he have a meaningful reception. In the other periods of the twentieth century his oeuvre had no chance to enroot into the Hungarian repertoire. So, I'll focus on his reception before the Second World War. I will briefly discuss the reasons why his compositions were not typically performed in Budapest and cite some of the few reviews. We can follow the trail of the above mentioned, three main Hungarian critics to him and identify their blind spots along the way. As a fan of Scriabin, it makes me sorry to report about his lukewarm reception, but as a scholar, it makes me delighted to consider a specific cultural process that attempted to make the stranger liked.

I will use the methods of sociology and discourse analysis to compare articles, essays, and reactions to Scriabin's works. The research in sociology discovered, that the repertoire of the Hungarian public is quite constrained. If we examine their limited selection of Russian music, we see that Piotr Tchaikovsky (1840 – 1893), Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Prokofiev (1891 – 1953) are preferred, while other composers are barely represented by one or two notable works. Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943) and Dmitry Shostakovich's (1906 – 1975) international acclaim occasionally had an effect in Budapest, but no true cult formed around them. Furthermore, not only is the repertoire restricted, but it also adheres to German musical culture. A typical Hungarian concertgoer would characterize music as German symphonies, concertos, overtures, and chamber pieces. They also love folklore pieces from around the world. Scriabin, who had his own, highly non-Germanic and non-folkloric style, was beyond the audience's comprehension. They attempted to comprehend him but failed.

To get an idea of how people have tried to interpret him, let's look at the epithets used to refer to Scriabin:

- *The master of Russian post-romanticism*⁹
- *The founder of Russian impressionism*¹⁰
- *The singer of mysticism the master of colors*¹¹
- *The Dionysian artist*¹²

⁹ Molnár Antal. "Modern bemutató-est" (Modern Premières). In *A Zene*, 1. December 1926. p. 93.

¹⁰ (h.e.) [= Haraszti Emil]. "Filharmónia" (Philharmonics). In *Budapesti Hírlap*, 11. March 1919, p. 5.

¹¹ Buday György. "Vándorló tüzek" (Wandering Fires, poem). In *Kecskeméti Ujság*, 17. May 1916, p. 2.

¹² Sonkoly István. "Az orosz zenéről" (The Russian Music). In *A Zene*, 11. March 1928, p. 217.

- *The dreamer plunged into the confused depths*¹³
- *Chased, sought ecstasy*¹⁴
- *Russian Bartok*¹⁵

The most skilled critics and aestheticians of Hungarian music culture at the time created the succinct summaries of this list. They received their musical education in the universities of music in Budapest, Vienna, and Paris before continuing their self-study based on publications in German, French, English, and Italian. Among the Scriabin critics, the mentioned three music historians stand out: Emil Haraszti, Imre Molnár and Antal Molnár.

I'll now demonstrate how listeners heard Scriabin's music and how they interpreted it. I will first discuss how he was received during his lifetime before moving on to his afterlife. During his lifetime, seven of his compositions were performed in Hungary. (See Table 1) As part of their respective concerts, Leopold Godowsky (1870 – 1938), Josef Lhévinne (1874 – 1944), and Arthur Rubinstein (1887 – 1982) performed the *Prélude et Nocturne* (1894), one of the *24 Préludes* (1896), and five of the *12 Etudes* (1894). Two of his symphonic compositions, *Rêverie* (1898) and *Symphony No. 3 - Le poème divin* (1903), were played by Hungarian orchestras in 1910. Hungarian music reviewers highly appreciated these pieces as well as others that were known to them only from sheet music.

According to the most recent research, his name first appeared in newspaper music sections in 1905. The occasion was the Hungarian conductor Arthur Nikisch's (1855 – 1922) Paris premiere of *Symphony No. 3*. The critic was rather biased for the conductor commenting that "*Nikisch conducted the overture to Freischütz, followed by extracts from Wagner's compositions, and a new four-movement symphony by the young Russian composer Scriabin titled The Divine Poem. Nikisch's recital of the composition gained him more success than the composer. The orchestra had departed, but the Parisian audience was still roaring and applauding around Nikisch.*"¹⁶

A year later Leopold Godowsky performed Scriabin for the first time in Hungary playing the *Prélude et Nocturne* and *four etudes* (F minor, D flat major, E-flat major, and F sharp minor from the *8 Études*, 1903). The compositions really impressed the critic of the day. "*The artist who creates such propaganda for his great colleague Scriabin cannot be accused of lacking*

¹³ Molnár Antal. "Európa zenéje a háború előtt" (The Pre-war European Music), In *Huszadik Század*, 1918/3, Special issue, p. 13.

¹⁴ (m.i.) [=Molnár Imre]. "Dobrowen a filharmonikusok élén" (Mr. Dobrowen Conducted the Philharmonics). In: *Magyarság*, 20. April 1937, p. 12.

¹⁵ (dr. B.D.). "Hoehn Alfréd hangversenye" (Alfred Hoehn's Concert). In: *Dunántúl*, 15. December, 1923, p. 7.

¹⁶ (*): "Nikisch Artur Parisban" (Arthur Nikisch in Paris). In *Pesti Napló*, 1. June 1905, p. 16.

*sincerity: we couldn't help but like his two exquisite preludes in a poetic performance. Godovsky performed these challenging tunes with just his left hand. This was only a fantastic feat of skill, but the manner in which he performed it - one-handed, with two or three simultaneous sections in the same key, and with a steady emphasis on the melody as it grows more significant - that is art. The Russian composer performed four further exquisite works with a minor Chopin influence.*¹⁷ A similarly positive engagement is evident in the Budapest premiere of *Le divin poème*. He emphasized that "The Symphony No. 3 by the Russian composer Scriabin was a new addition. It is unfortunate that its motions are identical, and the music (as the final track!), which is extremely loud yet covers many lovely themes with amazing skill, exhausts the listener's soul in 45 minutes. From his keyboard compositions, we have grown to admire and like this wonderful Russian composer."¹⁸ As we see, the critic noted the complexity and the excessive length of the composition that "tired the listeners' spirit".

Even though Scriabin was a part of the Hungarian repertoire when he passed away, his place in the canon of music history remained a question mark throughout the period under consideration. Between 1916 and 1938, twenty foreign musicians performed sixteen of his compositions in twenty-four piano recitals (see Table 2 and 3). The compositions that were most often performed were the cycle of *12 Études* (Op. 8), the *2 Poèmes* (Op. 32, 1904), and the *Sonata No. 4* (F sharp major, 1903), but there were also occasional performances of the late *Piano Sonatas Nos. 9 (Messe noire, 1913)* and *10 (Insect Sonata, 1913)*, as well as the *Poème satanique* (C major, 1903). Eighteen Hungarian performers played the same compositions on a total of twenty-two events. Among them, Ervin Nyíregyházi (1903 – 1987) and Lajos Kentner (1905 – 1987) rose to prominence on a global scale. At the Liszt Academy of Music (Budapest) István Tomka (1855 – 1923), later Imre Stefániai (1885 – 1959) were devoted tutors in Scriabin's music, and a group of students shared their enthusiasm. A total of eighteen Scriabin compositions were performed in forty-six performances across twenty-two years. It means, the Scriabin-rate was two pieces per a year in that period.

The guest performance of several foreign pianists starting in 1924 such as Gregor Piatigorsky (1903 – 1976), Albert Giesecking (1895 – 1956), and Eugen d'Albert (1864 – 1932) improved Scriabin's fame (see Table 3). Numerous excellent performances gave off the correct sensory impression, and more and more reviewers began to see the added value in the music

¹⁷ (-ly). "Godovszki hangversenye" (Mr. Godovsky's Concert). In *Ujság*, 30. November 1906, p. 12.

¹⁸ [Anonym]. "A budapesti filharmoniai társaság" [sic!] (The Budapest Philharmonic Society). In *Zenelap*, 1. March 1910, p. 5.

that went beyond contemporary technique. We can add to the number of the concerts the five orchestral performances, where two pieces were played: the *Symphony No. 4 – Le poème de l’extase* (1907) and the earlier mentioned *Le poème divin*. Three of the performances were led by foreign conductors including Ivan Boutnikoff (1893 – 1972) and Issay Dobrowen (1891 – 1953). (See Table 4) During the relevant period, Hungarian audiences favored Brahms and subsequently Bartók’s piano pieces over Scriabin’s, and Richard Strauss over his symphonic works. Nowadays, the music of Scriabin is becoming more widely known in Hungary. Finally, his symphonic compositions are being performed as well. The first two symphonies and the *Piano concerto* were given their premiere performances in 2008 by my friend and conductor Alpaslan Ertüngealp (1969 –), who was previously Claudio Abbado’s (1933 – 2014) assistant.

Table 4

1910, 13. 02.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Reverie</i> , op. 24. (1 st time)	Gschwindt Orchestra, cond. by Gschwindt
1910, 14. 02.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Le poème divin</i> (1 st time)	Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra (BPO), cond. by Kerner
1919, 10. 03.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Le poème de l’extase</i> (1 st time)	BPO, cond. by Dohnányi
1924, 03. 04.	Music Academy	<i>Le poème de l’extase</i>	Orchestra of Music Academy, cond. by Rékai
1926, 06. 12.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Le poème divin</i>	BPO, cond. by Rékai
1935, 11. 11.	Opera	<i>Le poème de l’extase</i>	BPO, cond. by Dobrowen, Issay
1937, 19. 04.	Municipal Theatre	<i>Le poème de l’extase</i>	BPO, cond. by Dobrowen, Issay
1945, 11. 12.	Opera	<i>Le poème divin</i>	BPO, cond. by M. Lukács
1968, 24. 10.	Music Academy	<i>Le poème de l’extase</i>	Moscow Radio and TV Symphony Orchestra, cond. by Gennady Rozhdestvensky
1979, 29. 03.	Music Academy	<i>Reverie</i>	Symphonic Orchestra of Miskolc, cond. by P. Mura
2001, 24. 03.	Congress Centre, Budapest	<i>Le Poème du feu</i> (1 st time)	Hungarian National Philharmonic, cond. by Z. Kocsis

Scriabin’s Orchestral Pieces in Hungarian Concerts

“The lack of pure forms”, Kodály’s circle on Scriabin

As he does with all composers, Kodály examines Scriabin considering the potential for fresh, contemporary Hungarian music. He lauded the composers he relied on to create it (such as Palestrina, Liszt, or Brahms) and derided the ones he was unable to. Throughout his lifetime, his stance remained constant and unwavering. His opinions had a significant impact on the viewpoint of his friends, particularly his close buddy Antal Molnár who was previously mentioned. The former was the one who initially published a piece about Kodály’s circle member Scriabin. The occasion was a new book on Arnold Schönberg (Piper, Munich, 1912). Antal Molnár analyses the book from the same perspective as Kodály, based on Schönberg’s body of work. He notes that the Austrian composer is the modest successor of Wagner, Strauss, and Mahler. (Scriabin will be characterized in terms essentially comparable to those of Schönberg.) While Molnár acknowledges Schönberg’s abilities, he sees them as insufficient to make him a good composer. *“Schönberg is a master among many, not the master; he has not so readily shaken anything in his works that he alone would have introduced to the world. He lacks the levity, originality, ingenuity, and remarkable attributes of Strauss or Mahler, and despite his considerable competence, he cannot forget the clumsiness and often flatness of his inventions.”*¹⁹ (Reading the lines, we can hear Molnár’s answer, who is the master of masters.)

In comparison, he views the harmonic structure and musicality of Scriabin (and, of course, Bartók) to be more creative than those of Schönberg. *“Unlike Schönberg, the refined Scriabin composed music from the heart and Bartók’s work is even more original because of its strong national flavour and appreciation of beauty.”*²⁰ Bartók’s (and Kodály’s) significance as a composer is the critic’s primary analytical objective. The similarity between Scriabin and Bartók’s work may have contributed to Molnár’s appreciation for the Russian composer. Scriabin and Bartók is mentioned together in very different context, also. *“The contemporary style is exemplified by the Russian Bartók, that is Scriabin, who is the embodiment of the contemporary search for novelty.”*²¹ For Molnár Bartók, the word “uniquely modern artist” had a positive connotation; for the referenced critic, however, it had a negative one. Knowing that we can take his comment as an insult rather than a praise.

Following Scriabin’s death Antal Molnár, who had obviously leftist sympathies said in his lecture on European music before the world war. *“In addition to the stupefying grandeur of the Russian novel and the revolutions,*

¹⁹ Molnár Antal. “Schönberg Arnold” (Arnold Schönberg). In *Nyugat*, 1912/11, p. 934.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 935.

²¹ (dr. B.D.). *Op. cit.* (1923), p. 7.

the still-raw but endlessly rich new instinct of their ardent music, which gave rise to Mussorgsky among others, signals the great moral power of the future of Europe originating from Russianness. The art of a truly independent Russia is not yet reflected in Scriabin's jumbled but profound fantasies or Stravinsky's realistic orchestra pieces, which paved new routes but are still firmly influenced by the West."²² Evidently, Molnár interpreted Scriabin's music from his sociologist aesthetic horizon and from Kodály's viewpoint. The impressionism of the Russian composer was a stylistic error from these two perspectives. Molnár considered beauty to be simple. ("*Beauty is always simple, just like everything that is true.*"²³) However, he could not see the inherently simple beauty in Impressionism, nor in Scriabin's compositions, which he categorized as Impressionist. Consequently, he did not have a high regard for Scriabin, although he eventually modified his opinion.

The Budapest Philharmonic Society's performance of Scriabin's *Symphony No. 4 (Poème de l'extase)* under the direction of Ernő Dohnányi on 10 March 1919. It was one of the turning moments in Scriabin's reception in Hungary. This concert produced several reviews, from which I have selected three to demonstrate the various aesthetic tendencies. On this topic, we will examine how Kodály and Haraszti became opponents. The criticism by Kodály, one of the most well-known Hungarian contemporary composers of the day, is evocative of Molnár's assertion. "*The other new composition, Scriabin's Poème de l'extase, was published in 1908. It is not among the truly outstanding pioneering works. If Strauss and certain contemporary clichés are removed, not much is left of this well-known oddity. It merits consideration as an orchestral studio.*"²⁴ It seems odd at first that the head of the Hungarian avant-garde would reject Scriabin's music while Haraszti, who Kodály and his circle deemed conservative, was excited about it. It is worth noting that in the same article Kodály highly praised Bartók's new compositions, as well, as he was notorious for defending his own primacy at any cost.

Nonetheless, his harsh critique also conceals a far deeper motivation. Kodály awaited the *Poème de l'extase* before listening to it. He pondered whether it represented a potential new direction for modern music. In his own notes, he elaborated on his dissatisfaction in greater detail. "*What has been termed ecstatic music until to this point will always remain foreign to the Hungarian: Bruckner, Mahler, and Scriabin, who follows in the footsteps of the Germans. For in these instances, 'ecstasy' disrupts form, proportions, clarity, simplicity, and equilibrium. The Hungarian music culture is not rational,*

²² Molnár. *Op. cit.* (1918), p. 13.

²³ Molnár. *Op. cit.* (1912), p. 935.

²⁴ Kodály. *Op. cit.* (1919), p. 6.

unlike French music, which is frequently dry and emotionless. In Hungarian music, passion is poured into form, and feeling is expressed architecturally."²⁵

Kodály aspired to develop a universal Hungarian musical language, never only his own style or a new composition. Despite his uniqueness, Scriabin was not a suitable role model for his universal objective. Kodály discovered his own path by drawing inspiration from Neoclassicism. His compositions are not formal, yet their structure is unambiguous. Rather than mysticism, he made Christianity the moral foundation of his work.

The same performance (*Poème de l'extase*, 10. March 1919) was interpreted similarly by an unidentified reviewer, who also criticized Scriabin for his lack of formal consistency and considered his music tedious. "*The evening's new work was Poème de l'extase by the recently departed Russian composer Scriabin. Scriabin, particularly in his later works – and this is one of them – is the most audacious and cutting-edge harmonic mixer. In the Poème, too, he relentlessly pursues each other with ever harsher dissonances, but the unbroken pursuit eventually gets boring. Thus, even the best orchestration cannot always maintain our attention. But Poème 's masterfully built, awe-inspiringly soaring conclusion is really effective.*"²⁶ As we can see, neither Molnár nor Kodály were the only individuals to hold the opinions they did.

Later, however, the stringent viewpoints shifted. Molnár discovered and praised the mystic and legendary substance of the composer's works ten years after the composer's death. "*The great post-romantic Russian, Scriabin, came here like Debussy: he too had a part to play in the birth of today's music with his achievements mainly in the field of harmony. (...) In Scriabin, sensual love creates a mythical world in which everything from Prometheus to the issue of divinity is on fire. His composition, Prélude op. 74. N° 3, which we are hearing today, is built on a single chord symbol and so envisions a technique that has only been used classically by a few select of the greatest composers of modern music.*"²⁷

Not less than a decade after his severe criticism Molnár accepts Scriabin's significance in connection to Debussy, just as he had previously done so in respect to Schönberg, and he stresses the moral content in addition to technical innovation. We may add that Molnár altered his viewpoint because he had a deeper understanding of music history and because Kodály held a secure place in contemporary Hungarian music. He also saw a comparable moral aim in the works of the two composers, and in the years following World War I, this became Molnár's major criterion of worth.

²⁵ Kodály Zoltán. *Magyar zene, magyar nyelv, magyar vers (Hungarian Music, Hungarian Language, Hungarian Poem)*. Ed. by Vargyas Lajos. Szépirodalmi Kiadó, Budapest, 1993, p. 116.

²⁶ (*). "Hangversenyek" (Concerts). In *Ujság*, 11. March 1919, p. 7.

²⁷ Molnár. *Op. cit.*, (1926), p. 93.

“The maestro of color”, Haraszti on Scriabin

Scriabin’s Hungarian admirer, Emil Haraszti agreed on three issues with Kodály’s assessment of Hungarian musical tradition. He saw that the Hungarian musical language was drawn from German late Romanticism and that a significant renewal was required. He also realized that Romantic Hungarian style (*style hongrois*) was worn out. Haraszti was different from Kodály, nevertheless, in that he did not repudiate either the Romantic German musical legacy or the *style hongrois* musical subject. Haraszti wanted to revitalize Hungarian culture by importing the cutting-edge music of contemporary France. As we know, Kodály saw Hungarian folk music as the only source of renewal for the modern Hungarian musical language, which he intended to modernize through the combined influence of English, French, and Italian musical culture.

Haraszti’s first reference to Scriabin was in 1914. His article demonstrates his profound knowledge and comprehension of Russian music. Haraszti criticized the Budapest Philharmonic Society’s new season in 1914 for omitting current Russian masters. “*Where are the delightfully imaginative Glazunov, the light and color flashing Scriabin, the pensive Lyadov, the charmingly enigmatic Lyapunov, and the musical pyrotechnician Stravinsky?*”²⁸ In addition to Haraszti, other journalists, such as Dezső Buday (1879-1919), a Hungarian lawyer, poet, and revolutionary, had a comprehensive view on Russian music culture. In his poem on the influence of World War I on cultural policy, he goes even farther by naming virtually unknown people. “*Their melancholy music is resonating now and is sweeter than any song ever sung by a human. Tchaikovsky is the lutenist of the troika, followed by Scriabin, the mystic singer, and Vladimir Rebikov, the horror poet. Also from the snowfields are the lute musicians Andrey Ilyashenko, Alexander Kopilov, Lyadov, Korsakov, Pogoyev, and Borodin.*”²⁹ Impressive insight from 1916; the modern-day concertgoer from Hungary is familiar with Borodin, Korsakov, and Scriabin and may have heard of Lyadov.

Haraszti produced his most significant article about Scriabin upon the composer’s passing. Due to the war, news of his death was reported from Copenhagen half a month later, and most of the newspaper published the obituary written by Haraszti. He emphasized the composer’s utmost

²⁸ (h.e.) [=Haraszti Emil]. “Filharmóniai hangverseny” (Philharmonic concert). In *Budapesti Hírlap*, 13. January 1914, p. 17. The obscure composer’s name is Sergei Mikhailovich Lyapunov (1859-1924).

²⁹ Buday. *Op. cit.*, 1916, p. 2. The mentioned obscure composers: Vladimir Ivanovich Rebikov (1866 – 1920), André Stepanovich Illiashenko (1884 — 1954), Alexander Alexandrovich Kopilov (1854 – 1911), Nicolai Pogoyev (1872 – 1941).

originality. *"Scriabin was a truly original artist. He did not belong to any school or group, even though his piano pieces resonate with Chopin and his symphonic works have some kinship to Debussy in shape and color respectively. Additionally, he holds a unique, nearly solitary position in the evolution of Russian music. He was the maestro of color."*³⁰ However, he noted that *"His shapes lack precise constructive logic and are arbitrary and capricious."*³¹ What is amazing is not only that against the background of the war the enemy's artist is profoundly grieved, but also that his latest pieces were well-known. Thus, quite surprisingly, the *Mysterium* (uncomp. 1915), which was still in draft format, was already known to musicologists in Budapest. Here I refer to Haraszti again. *"Scriabin aimed to translate into music Baudelaire's aesthetics of the interaction between light and fragrance. (...) He sought to project smell clouds onto the audience in the Mysterium, which he worked on in the latter years of his life. Even his conservative adversaries could not dispute Scriabin's inventiveness, ingenuity, or superb sense of color. His designs were daring and avant-garde."*³²

Haraszti interpreted Scriabin's music from a French cultural perspective, as is evident. The relationship between French and Russian composers is a recurring topic in Hungarian musicology. One of the most known Hungarian music historians, István Sonkoly (1907 - 1988), wrote about it: *"The most interesting (Russian) composers include Scriabin, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Myaskovsky. However, the relationship between Russia and France is founded on reciprocity. Paris is the city that most welcomes Russian music. Composers in Paris are vulnerable to mutual influences. Critics of his day said that even Debussy had succumbed to the Russian myth, whereas he evaded the Germanic myth. (...) Scriabin employs an impressionistic motif style. His works include Dionysian ambiance and ancient epic poetry."*³³ Haraszti's Francophonie helped him appreciate the universe of the Russian composer, whilst Kodály's world of peasant songs allowed him to detach himself from Scriabin.

Haraszti also reported on the mentioned concert of *Poème de l'extase* (13. March 1919). It is obvious from the contrast between his essay and the earlier cited reviews that at the time, he was the only person who respected Scriabin. *"In the second year of the war, Scriabin, the pioneer of Russian Impressionism, passed away, his expanded quarter-tone system and his light piano making his name renowned internationally when his much younger*

³⁰ (*) [= Haraszti Emil]. "Skrjabin meghalt" (Scriabin's Death). In *Budapesti Hírlap*, 26. May 1915, p. 15.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Sonkoly. *Op. cit.* (1928), p. 217.

contemporary Stravinsky eclipsed his fame. Scriabin, like other Russian poets, employs the national tradition. His ideas are founded on Russian themes, but what gives his work its own, original flavour is his self-aware, intentional use of dissonance and his colorism, which makes it even more magnificent. With him, there is no distinction between consonance and dissonance; everything is harmonious. Thus, even the most remote partials of a note are in harmony with it, at least in Scriabin's mind. His painting's great instrumentalists have a connection to Berlioz through Richard Strauss. The art he is presenting today, *Poème de l'extase*, is an apotheosis of human will, of spiritual fervor."³⁴ The critique of Scriabin by Haraszti uncovers a neglected aesthetic discourse of early Hungarian modernism. Even now, we are still in his debt.

Late laudation on Poem of Ecstasy (I. Molnár)

Scriabin was described as a genius by Imre Molnár, as well, an expert in musical phonetics. "*Alexander Scriabin (1871-1915), the eccentric disciple of Taneyev, was a prodigy with a penchant for audacious inventiveness. His three symphonies, Le divin poème, Poème d'extase and Prométhée – Le Poème du feu, emit a weird aura of mysticism and push the limits of unreal pure music.*"³⁵ However, four years later he was incredibly unsatisfied with the performance of *Le Poème de l'extase*, and he penned a scathing review. "*Following in the traditions of Wagner, the work's twisted lines spread furiously over the horns of the amplified brass during frenzied climaxes. It is a sought-after, pursued bliss that becomes weary of the onslaught, then resumes till exhaustion. Even with the finest performers, it is hardly a soul-satisfying work, but Master Dobrowen has demonstrated a talent for intensification.*"³⁶ Since he had referred to the Russian composer as a genius four years prior, these scathing sentiments are unexpected for him.

In Haraszti's absence (he had resided in Paris since 1927), Scriabin's defense fell to another journalist. The columnist of the daily paper *Hungarian Sport* had one of the most positive reviews of the same show. The passionate soccer reviewer thoroughly appreciated it. "*Scriabin is the next! He bestowed to us the transfiguration religion, the hymn of ecstasy, and a stunning musical experience unheard before. Both amazing and frenetic, this music. It is the ultimate shout of victory, or the delirium of the believer, follower, or devotee. Or the joy of a genius who redeemed the world and discovered the purpose*

³⁴ (h.e.) (Haraszti Emil). *Op. cit.* (1919), p. 5.

³⁵ (Molnár Imre). "Modern zene" (Modern Music). In *Tolnai Világlexikona (Encyclopedia of Tolnai)*. Tolnai Nyomdai Műintézet és Kiadóvállalat Rt., Budapest, 1933. 2nd Supplements, p. 173.

³⁶ (m.i.) (= Molnár Imre). *Op. cit.* (1937), p. 12.

of existence. Shocks and inspires, terrifies, and enthralls, to unknown, lethal delights, terrifying pleasure, and victories beyond the limits. What music and what interpretation!"³⁷ The expression in his essay was visceral.

Finally, although Kodály was uninterested in Scriabin's music, his students Antal and Imre Molnár attempted to comprehend it. The fact that Scriabin did not become a regular concert program was, however, not their fault. Considering Kodály, Molnár, and Haraszti's prior critique, it is time to revise the discourse about him.

TABLES

Table No. 1

Date	Place	Title	Performers
1906, Nov.	Theatre Room of Royal Hotel	<i>Etudes (f minor, d flat minor, e-minor, f sharp minor), 2 preludes for left hand</i>	Godowsky, Leopold
1910, 13. 02.	University of Technology (Budapest)	<i>Reverie, op. 24.</i>	Gschwindt Orchestra, György Gschwindt
1910; 14. 02.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Le poème divin</i>	Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra (BFTZ), István Kerner
1910, 17. 02.	University of Technology (Budapest)	<i>Reverie, op. 24.</i>	Gschwindt Orchester, Gschwindt
1914, 13. 01.	Academy of Music	<i>Etude D flat major, (op. 8/10, "Terc"), Nocturne for left hand</i>	Lhévinne, Josef
1914, 24. 02.	Theatre Room of Royal Hotel	<i>Nocturne for left hand</i>	Rubinstein, Arthur
1916, 03. 12.	Academy of Music	<i>Nocturne for left hand</i>	Gruss Ernő
1917, 15. 03.	Academy of Music	<i>4. (F sharp major) piano sonata</i>	Vas Sándor
1919, 10. 03.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Le poème de l'extase</i>	BFTZ, Dohnányi Ernő
1920, 05. 03.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>2 preludes for left hand</i>	Friedmann, Ignacy

³⁷ [Anonym]. "Napi éterreport" (Daily Radio Report). In *Nemzeti Sport*, 12. November, 1935, p. 6.

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Date	Place	Title	Performers
1920, 29. 05.	Theatre "Belvárosi"	<i>Preludes in A flat major</i> , (op. 11/17), C in sharp minor, (op. 11/10), in B minor (op. 11/6)	Dienzl Oszkár
1921, 03.	Foyer of Rózsavölgyi Company	4. (<i>F sharp major</i>) <i>piano sonata</i>	Vas Sándor
1922, 06. 03.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Prelude in G flat major</i> , <i>Etude in D sharp minor</i> (op. 8/12)	Achron, Isidor
1922, 07. 11.	Academy of Music	<i>Impromptu</i>	Zitzer Piroska
1922, 25. 11.	Academy of Music	<i>Etudes</i> (op. 42/1, 5)	Gy. Márkus Lily
1924, 15. 01.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Poema</i> (op. 69)	Albert, Eugen D'
1924, 19. 01.	Academy of Music	Piano sonata (C-dúr, op. 53)	Leopold Münzer
1924, 03. 04.	Academy of Music	<i>Le poème de l'extase</i>	Orchestra of Music Academy, Nándor Rékai
1922, 22. 04.	Academy of Music.	<i>Etude</i>	Schwalb, Miklós
1924, 06. 05.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Poema</i> (in F sharp major, op. 32/1), <i>Etude</i> (in D flat major, op 8/10), <i>Ballada</i> (in A flat major)	Backhaus, Wilhelm
1924, 09. 10.	Music Academy	<i>Poema</i> (op. 32), <i>Etude</i> (op. 8)	Borovsky, Alexander
1924, 07. 11.	Music Academy	<i>Poeme stanique</i> (op. 36)	Frey, Emil
1924, 30. 11.	Music Academy	<i>Poema</i> (op. 32)	Friedman
1924, 18. 12.	Music Academy	<i>Etude</i> (?)	Honti József
1925, 07. 03.	Music Academy	<i>Prelude</i> (in D major)	Herz Ottó (piano), Wilke Lotte (dance)
1925, 25. 11.	Music Academy	4 <i>Etude</i> (op. 8)	Borovsky
1925, 19. 12.	Music Academy	10. <i>Piano sonata</i> (op. 70)	Hoehn, Alfred
1926, 05. 02.	Music Academy	<i>Preludes</i>	Wit, Margarete
1926, 24. 02.	Music Academy	<i>Etude</i> (op. 8)	Eisenberger, Severin
1926, 06. 12.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Le poème divin</i>	BFTZ, Rékai
1927, 02. 07.	Music Academy	<i>Poema</i> (op. 32)	Krauss Lili
1928, 07. 03.	Music Academy	<i>Etude</i> (op. 8)	Rosenka Josefa
1930, 07. 02.	The Pest Vigadó	4 <i>Piano sonata</i> (<i>F sharp major</i>)	Gieseking, Walter
1930, 02. 04.	Music Academy	<i>Prelude</i> (in G major)	Hir Sári (wife of Imre Molnár)

SCRIABIN AND KODÁLY IN THE READING OF ANTAL MOLNÁR, IMRE MOLNÁR...

Date	Place	Title	Performers
1930, 17. 11.	Music Academy	<i>Piano sonata</i> (in C major, Op. 53)	Nyíregyházi Ervin
1930, 08. 12.	Music Academy	<i>Etude</i> (in D flat major)	Rosenthal, Moritz
1931, 18. 02.	Music Academy	<i>Etude</i> (in E major), <i>Nocturne</i>	Herz Lili
1931, 07. 11.	Music Academy	<i>2 Etudes</i> (op.42)	Friedman
1931, 19. 11.	Music Academy	<i>4. Piano sonata</i> (in F sharp major, op. 30.)	Kentner Lajos
1932, 21. 05.	Music Academy	<i>Vers la flamme</i> (op. 72)	Lászlóffy Margit
1932, 04. 12.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Romance</i>	Piatigorsky, Gregor
1933, 24. 10.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Poeme satanique</i> (op. 36)	Nyíregyházi
1933, 07. 11.	Music Academy	<i>Poema</i> (op. 32)	Taras, Mykyscha
1933, 24. 11.	Music Academy	<i>9. Piano sonata</i> (op. 68)	Kentner Lajos
1934, 13. 11.	Városi Színház	<i>Le poème de l'extase</i> , op. 54	Budapest Concert Orchestra, Boutnikoff, Ivan
1934, 30. 11.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Etude</i> (in E major)	Márky Pál
1934, 08. 12.	Music Academy	<i>Etude</i> (op. 8)	Gradova Gitta
1935, 03. 03.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Etude</i> (in D flat major, op. 8/10)	Szigeti József, Magaloff, Nikita de
1935, 11. 11.	Opera	<i>Le poème de l'extase</i> , op. 54	BFTZ, Dobrowen, Issay
1936, 26. 03.	Municipal Theatre	<i>Etude</i> (in D flat major, op. 8/10)	Szigeti, Magaloff
1936, 17. 04.	Music Academy	<i>2 Etudes</i> (op. 8)	Megaloff
1936, 29. 04.	Music Academy	<i>Etude</i> (op. 2)	Stanislav, Frydberg - Herz
1936, 02. 05.	Music Academy	<i>Etude</i> (op. 42)	Chatterton, Frank
1937, 19. 01.	Music Academy	<i>1. Piano Sonata</i> (in F minor, op. 6)	Taras
1937, 19. 03.	The Pest Vigadó	<i>Prelude and nocturne</i> (op. 9)	Lhévinne
1937, 19. 04.	Municipal Theatre	<i>Le poème de l'extase</i> , op. 54	BFTZ, Dobrowen, Issay
1937, 27. 11.	Music Academy	<i>Prelude</i> (in D major)	Andersen, Stell
1938, 11. 04.	Music Academy	<i>Polonese</i>	Bishop, Frank

The Scriabin's Pieces in Hungarian Concerts between 1906 and 1938

Table No. 2

12 Études (op. 8) – selction
8 Études (op. 42) – selection
Ballada (Asz-dúr)
Etude (op. 2 – átirat)
Impromptu
2 Poèmes (Fisz-dúr, op. 32/1)
2 Poèmes (op. 69)
Poème satanique (op. 36)
Polonaise in B-flat minor
24 Préludes (op. 11) – selection
Romance
Vers la flamme (op. 72)
Sonate No. 1 in F minor (op. 6)
Sonate No. 4 in F sharp major
Sonate No. 5 in C major (op. 53)
Sonate No. 9 (Messe noir) (Black Mass, op. 68)
Sonate No. 10. (Insect Sonata) (op. 70)

Scriabin's Piano Pieces in Hungarian Concerts (1906 – 1938)

Table No. 3

Guest performers

Achron, Isidor	Albert, Eugen D'
Andersen, Stell	Backhaus, Wilhelm
Bishop, Frank	Borovszkij, Alexander
Chatterton, Frank	Eisenberger, Severin
Frey, Emil	Friedmann, Ignacy
Giesecking, Walter	Hoehn, Alfred
Lhévinne, Josef	Magaloff, Nikita de
Münzer, Leopold	Piatigorsky, Gregor
Rosenthal, Moritz	Stanislav, Frydberg – Herz
Taras, Mykyscha	Wit, Margarete

Hungarians

Dienzl Oszkár	Gradova Gitta
Gruss Ernő	Gy. Márkus Lily
Herz Lili	Herz Ottó
Hir Sári	Honti József
Kentner Lajos	Krauss Lili
Lászlóffy Margit	Márky Pál
Nyíregyházi Ervin	Rosenka Josefa
Schwalb, Miklós	Szigeti József
Vas Sándor	Zitzer Piroska

The Performers of Scriabin's Pieces in Hungarian Concerts 1906 – 1938

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