

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COLOUR AND MUSIC IN THE ART OF COMPOSER EDE TERÉNYI

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**SUMMARY.** From his early youth, the composer lived his whole life under the spell of colors and color combinations. His talent as an artist was already apparent at the age of six, when, in addition to his piano studies, he enjoyed drawing plants and flowers in school notebooks. He kept his first vase, on one side of which he drew a bouquet of flowers sprouting from a heart on a bright pale green background when he was in high school, and on the other side a deer flying through a bush and a pine tree. She always felt a special fascination for the pine tree, seeing it as a symbol, its scent, and its green color as magical. He was similarly attracted to green grassy lawns and the changing colors of autumn leaves, which he saw as a symphony.<sup>2</sup> These childhood experiences are also reflected in his colorful graphics. This paper presents the relationship between color and music in Ede Terényi's compositions, and the composer's conception of tonal aesthetics, the relationship between tonalities and colors.

**Keywords:** Ede Terényi, composer, music compositions, colors, tonalities, graphics

Ede Terényi has been creating color graphics since the age of 41. In several Transylvanian cities he had exhibitions of his works during his concerts. Towards the end of his life, he consciously took on a career as a graphic artist and painter, equating it with his work as a composer.<sup>3</sup> His colorful graphics are abstract works of art, imaginative images that develop

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<sup>2</sup> Terényi, Ede. *Zeném – Életem. Gondolatok – arcképek – emlékek. Életrajz I. (My Music - My Life. Reflections - Portraits - Memories. Biography I)*, Grafycolor Stúdió, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> Idem. p. 20-21.



in their full form in the composer's imagination while writing a longer piece of music, and which the composer puts down on paper under the influence of inspiration. The composer did not see his colorful pictures as illustrations, but as fellow travelers accompanying his music.<sup>4</sup>

Quoting the composer:

"...I'm a composer with a visual artist's bent. I see and experience the world and music in images. In my color graphics, I am attracted by abstraction, the possibility of non-thematicity, the free flow of colors and lines, the freedom of fantasy, the ecstatic joy of liberation from all constraints."<sup>5</sup>

In search of Dante's message for today's man, the composer, influenced by the poet's *Divine Comedy* and at the same time commissioned, created a graphic series of 25 images, consisting of 7 images (*Inferno*) + 9 images (*Purgatorio*) + 9 images (*Paradiso*). To quote the author: "...the images on the *Dantesca* album are much more than illustrations; they are pictorial foreshadowing of my later music. The title of my three-part work for the *Divine Comedy*, in the spirit of Mussorgsky, could be written as follows: *Pictures from a personal exhibition*".<sup>6</sup> This was translated into music in the composer's mono-opera *La Divina Commedia*, written in 2004. A detailed analysis of this work can be found in my book *Ede Terényi. History and analyses*<sup>7</sup>, on the following website: (99+) Ede Terenyi. History and Analysis | Gabriela Coca - Academia.edu. The mono-opera *La Divina Commedia* is a prequel to the composer's chamber sonata *Terzine di Dante*, written in 1972 by Ede Terényi for baritone voice, piano and trombone.

Both *Dantesca* and all his published works can be found on the Internet on the websites I have set up in memory of the composer: <https://ede-terenyi-sheet-music.webnode.hu> as well as on his blogspot: <https://ede-terenyi-sheet-music.blogspot.com> and on academia.edu: <https://independent.academia.edu/EdeTerényi>.

His books on music, as well as the covers of some 50 volumes of his published music, also lean towards the visual, illustrated with colorful graphics of the composer's own creation.

Many of these colourful graphics and images can be found on a biographical blog for the composer, created by a colleague of mine (Dr. Carmen Vasile), entitled: <https://ede-terenyi.blogspot.com>.

<sup>4</sup> Terényi, Ede. *Zeném – Életem. Gondolatok – arcképek – emlékek. Életrajz I. (My Music - My Life. Reflections - Portraits - Memories. Biography I)*, Grafycolor Stúdió, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, p. 27-28.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Coca, Gabriela. *Ede Terényi. History and analysis*. Cluj University Press, Cluj-Napoca, 2010.

Volume I of his autobiography, published in the year of his death, is illustrated with many pictures, which the composer intended to deepen the visual experience for the reader.<sup>8</sup>

In his autobiography, quoting from an interview entitled *Five senses and the harmony of the soul. Sándor Balázs talks to composer Ede Terényi*,<sup>9</sup> Ede Terényi writes about his own synesthetic ability:

*“Question 8: Do the images also have music, a sound in the musical sense, a mood? And vice versa: can a piece of music be understood as a series of images? For you, there is an interpenetration between the senses: music can be seen, graphics can be heard?”*

We have come to the point.

Music emanates from everything that surrounds us. More specifically: music, among a million other pieces of information. The large Persian carpet under my feet is a symphony with its sumptuous lines and its swirling orgy of color. So, as I look at it again, it occurs to me now that many of the musical moments in my mono-opera, woven from a tale in the *Mahabharata*, were inspired by these patterns. Glancing to the right, I see how the pattern of the floor mat “decorating” my bookcase is very similar to one of my music graphic scoresheets for *Gates of Sky*. In secret ways, images and information sneak into us, which later emerge from our imagination as music. Maybe because they came to us as music in the first instance. I love to listen to the scherzo of the bell-bongo orchestra of the millions of little pebbles lining the courtyard, warmed by the warmth of the sun, to the music of the Ady poem (on a pile of flowers in autumn), to the chattering of flowers, to the star music of summer nights. We are surrounded by thousands of music of the five senses. We not only listen to the world with our ears, but we identify with it with our whole being. Every moment we are “listening” to the symphony of the Universe. This is true even if we cannot or do not want to have a rational relationship with it.

In fact, I am singing a “poem” about synesthesia. For me, I perceive all the elements of music - and everyone does - with my other senses in addition to the auditory ones. For example, colors “stick” to every sound. Bright red for C sharp, grass green for F sharp, white for C, and so on within my own separate ethos of sound. Alongside this, the chord, the tonality ethos, has also developed. I have touch, taste and smell sensations attached to every element of music in my consciousness. They are formed from experiences,

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<sup>8</sup> Terényi, Ede. *Zeném – Életem. Gondolatok – arcképek – emlékek. Életrajz I. (My Music - My Life. Reflections - Portraits - Memories. Biography I)*, Grafycolor Stúdió, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Balázs, Sándor. *Öt érzék és a lélek harmóniája. Terényi Ede zeneszerzővel Balázs Sándor beszélget. (Five senses and harmony of the soul. Sándor Balázs talks to composer Ede Terényi)*. In <https://hitelfolyoirat.hu/sites/default/files/pdf/08-terenyi.pdf>

memories, “accidental” coincidences. In addition to the steel-grey color of the E-flat music, I also detect a metallic taste.

We “listen” to music with five senses. Woe to those who do not, they are depriving themselves of a wonderful experience.”<sup>10</sup>

Knowing this ethos of sound and tonality, we can also interpret the composer’s analyses of his works differently, and certainly better understand what his music must suggest.

In this context, I would like to continue here with an experience of my own:

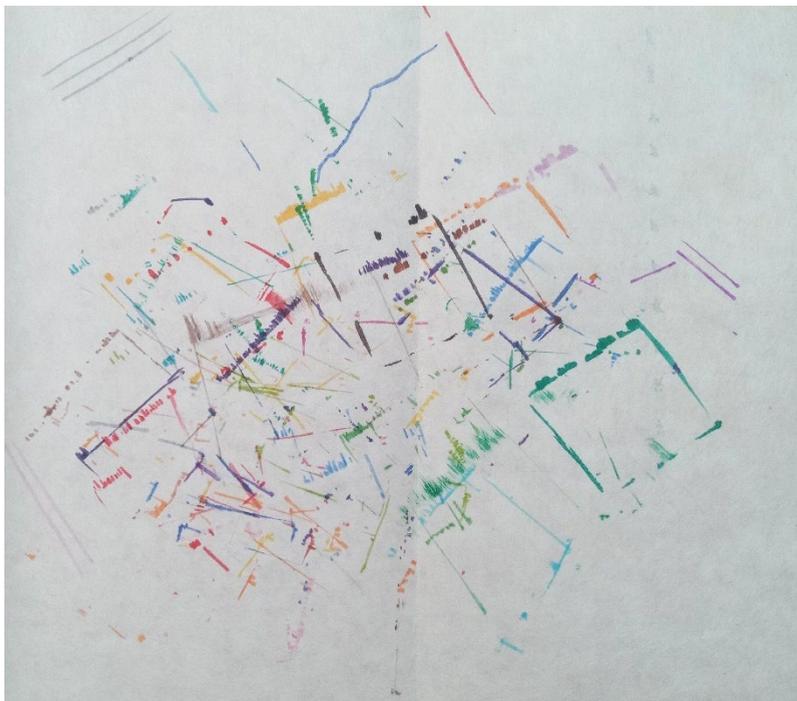
- I worked with Ede Terényi for 17 years, he was my musicology teacher at the university, he taught harmony to our class, and I attended 5 years of music dramaturgy classes with him, with the opera staging students who were starting at that time. I wrote my master’s and doctoral dissertations with him. I also proofread a lot of his newly edited scores from 1990 until 2007, when I took a competitive examination for an adjunct professorship at the BBTE and left the Music Academy. Until 2009, he regularly brought his scores for proofreading, then he stopped, his wife was ill, my schedule became busy with accreditation dossiers, I had no physical time for him. Ede Terényi was a very good professor, we communicated openly, we talked weekly, I could discuss everything with him, including personal problems, and I always took his opinion into account in my decisions. In his lessons, in his classes, he tried to educate a human being and not just to deliver a dry lesson. I also kept a diary of my lessons, after lessons, as long as it was very fresh in my memory, I wrote down everything that could be written down. Slowly, it became several pencil-filled notebooks, more than 550 pages, which I still turn over with pleasure and usefulness. One day it may see the light of printing.

Back at the beginning of our collaboration, in 1992, on Richard Wagner’s birthday, May 22, which we celebrated with a pint of beer each in a musicology class (which was an individual class in the teaching system of the time), I told him about my plans to use colors to illustrate my tonal and instrumental analyses, and that I would need the color vision and definition of tonalities of a composer who “suffers” from synesthesia. To do this, I made small 3x3 cm colored squares of as many colors as I could find and create with a felt-tip pen, drew the quintuple column on a white sheet of paper and asked the professor to match the colored squares to the tones. He obviously enjoyed the task and appreciated my spontaneous artistic creation, the drawing on paper on which I colored the squares:

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<sup>10</sup> Balázs, Sándor. *Őt érzék és a lélek harmóniája Terényi Ede zeneszerzővel Balázs Sándor beszélget*, p. 64. In <https://hitelfolyoirat.hu/sites/default/files/pdf/08-terenyi.pdf>

E.g. 1



The tones of voice, the descriptions given in class, in the order given by Ede Terényi and written on the paper, were as follows:

- C# minor = Nice red, should be slightly more yellow than here.
- G minor = Ashen grey, like plum. Blue, silvery grey (grey + blue mix).
- E flat major = Steel grey. Blue grey.
- D major = Gold. Glossy tinfoil paper.
- F major = more neutral yellow. The lightness of the air. Pastoral color. This is too bright.
- B major = Tone of happiness. Plays in violet. Not too strong purple. Silky.
- C minor = Grayness. Pure grey. Turtle dove.
- E flat minor = Purple with a touch of grey.
- G flat major = A lighter black.
- B minor = Shades of grey tending towards black.
- A flat major = A warm, brownish steel grey.
- D flat major = Manly brown.
- G flat major = Leaning into black.
- C flat major = Light black.

- F minor = Like a yellow stoplight indicating danger. Yellow.
- E flat minor = Bishop's purple.
- A flat minor = Blackish purple.
- A minor = Bronze red. The bronze skin of the Indians. The red version of brown.
- C sharp major = Dark blood. Bordeaux red.
- B major = Darker yellow.
- D flat minor = Yellowish brown.
- A flat minor = Dark red, tending to burgundy.
- G# minor = Yellowish black.

Then he continued with these words: "This color ethos is individual for everyone. Now I'm like when I compose. I've never thought about drawing the colors of the notes in a quintuple column before. Then do a little analysis on the list, for example, what colors I give to the tones on the axis. So, with ready-made colors it's hard to find the right one, and just about the color I've stuck on. When I mix the colors myself, that's the real thing".<sup>11</sup>

Placement of the described color list on the quintuple column:

**E.g. 2**

C# major	Burgundy red
Ais minor	Tending to black, burgundy red
F# major	Dark green, evergreen
Dis minor	Dark brown, sunburnt body color
B major	Yellow
Gis minor	Mixed with blackish yellow
E major	Dark sky blue
C# minor	Orange color
A major	Peach blossom red. Red
F# minor	A slightly cool greenish blue. Grass green
D major	Golden yellow. Cornflower color

<sup>11</sup> Discussion with Ede Terényi, Cluj, 22.05.1992.

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B minor	Blinding yellowish green
G major	Ash with a grey bluish tinge
E minor	Light blue. White blue
C major	White
A minor	Ash bronze red (Indian red)
F major	Very light yellow
D minor	Intense yellow
B flat major	Ash purple
G minor	Grey purple
E flat major	Steel grey (bluish)
C minor	Grey
A flat major	Ash (steel grey), tending to brown
F minor	Warning yellow
D flat major	Brown
B flat minor	Greyish purple
G flat major	Black
E flat minor	Dark purple
C flat major	Light black
A flat minor	Very dark purple

And here are the colors arranged in major/minor on the C tonic center axis:

**Tonic axis:**

<b>F#</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>E flat</b>	<b>G flat</b>
MAJOR: Dark green, evergreen	Peach blossom red. Red	White	Steel grey (bluish)	Black
MINOR: A slightly cool greenish blue. Grass green	Ash bronze red (Indian red)	Grey	Dark purple	-

**Dominant axis:**

<b>C#</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>B flat</b>	<b>D flat</b>
MAJOR: Bordeaux red	Dark sky blue	Ash with a grey bluish tinge	Ash purple	Brown
MINOR: Orange color	Light blue. White blue	Grey, purple	Greyish purple	-

**Subdominant axis:**

<b>B</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A flat</b>	<b>C flat</b>
MAJOR: Yellow	Golden yellow. Cornflower colour	Very light yellow	Ash (steel grey), tending to brown	Light black
MINOR: Blinding yellowish green	Intense yellow	Warning yellow	Very dark purple	-

**Observations**

It is interesting to color in the squares of the table above and observe the changes, the relationship of colors and sounds to each other, the unfolding. Knowing the composer's such synesthetic abilities, the musicologist who analyses a work of music also looks differently at the composer's work, at

certain tonally centered parts of it. The composer very often gave his compositions expressive titles. Even reading the title of a work encourages the analyst to explore this field further, to delve deeper into the meanings that the composer has encoded in the sounds of his scores. So, for example, I take some of Ady's poems set to music for voice and piano. I wonder what colors the composer has mixed into the *Rose Grove in the Wilderness*, or *Autumn on a pile of hot flowers*, or *Songs on a fiery chariot*. I wonder what colors he mixed in *Golden spring*, or *La Puerta del Sol*, or *The silver forest* concerto, or *Liturgy of green forests* chamber symphony for strings? I leave these questions open. You can listen to more of the composer's works on YouTube and find the sheet music. In the first volume of his biography, the author makes much reference to color and the colorful palette of his imagination. It is worth reading and exploring this topic in more depth.

## REFERENCES

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