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Thesis

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A Construed Portrait of Mihalovich Ödön

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The portrait of Mihalovich Ödön

I have completed my PhD-essay on Mihalovich Ödön, an outstanding composer of the Hungarian Romanticism, whose oeuvre was worth to be included in the national musical canon of 1947, still it was omitted. We can read about him everywhere in Hungarian music history, e.g. Szabolcsi Bence (1947/61), and Dobszay László (1984), in different music lexicons, moreover he has an English Wikipedia site, however– being excluded of the national canon – today he is an unknown composer.

The primary reason for my interest in him, was that in his oeuvre a wide range of topics of the Hungarian culture history can be traced and analysed, such as the first Hungarian musical Nietzsche-reception, the correspondence of Hungarian literature and symphonic music, the composer's changing literary horizon, the formation of the cultural double bonding, the symbiosis of the so called Verbunk music („style hongrois”) and the so called „Zukunftsmusik” (Music of the Future), and the creation of the Hungarian Music Academy by setting up its educational structure, and its audience shaping “mission”. The activity of Mihalovich provides a fertile ground for these studies, because his opus embodies the peak of the Hungarian ‘Lisztian-Wagnerian School’.

Angle and Manner of the Analysis

I interpret the compositions from historical, literary and symphonic point of views, finally I analyse the merging of these horizons. In the symphonic reading I follow the methods of Wilhelm András and Dalos Anna.

According to Wilhelm: “It is important and self-evident to Bartók, that music does have content even in the sense of program music, and not only in his early years.” Dalos wrote: “I built my analyses upon the hypothesis, that even absolute music has certain programmatic lines, that is to say: it has meaning. ... I am to discover narrative structures by the way of various musical elements – among others Kodály's typical intonations, topos, or special composition techniques of Kodály.”

In the parallel reading of music and literature I managed to apply Szabolcsi's music history, the Liszt-studies of Alan Walker and Legány Dénes, Szerző Katalin's musicological

MA-thesis of on Mihalovich's operas and Virág Emese's DLA-thesis on Mihalovich's songs, and Major Ervin's Mihalovich's biography .

I compared the oeuvre, with the life of the author, set it in the literary traditions of his age and identified significant personal archetypes in his works. All these findings are supported by Mihalovich's letters. This way not only the manner of close reading, the aesthetics of reception or the canon disciplines were involved in the analyses but even the composer himself got included in the process.

Mihalovich Ödön

I wrote the biography using various source texts. Naturally, I had to start from Major's cited biography, but the correspondence of Liszt (edited by Prahács Margit) and Mihalovich (edited by Inge Birkin) were also very important. Further I used unpublished manuscripts, e.g. the author's two Curriculum vitae sketches, and the letters of Cosima and Bülow. In addition I used the family studies of Sylvija Lučevnák, (2009) that profoundly changed the concept of the Mihalovich-dynasty.

Mihalovich Ödön (1842-1929) was born in a rich, noble Hungarian-Croatian landowner family in Fericance. He attended a high school in Budapest, where he got his first music education at Mosonyi Mihály. 1862 he participated in the première of Tannhäuser in Pest as well as in 1863 Richard Wagner's guest performance. These two experiences influenced his decision to be a composer. Between 1865 and 1870 his masters were M. Hauptmann, P. Cornelius, and H. Bülow in Leipzig and München. He was the member of the so called „Neudeutsche Schule” (New German School of composers). In 1870 he moved to Pest, deliberating his music, where he became member of Liszt's circle.

In the 1870's he composed four, popular song cycles, several important symphonic ballads (*Der Geisterschiff*, *Die Nixe*, *Hero und Leander*, *La Ronde du Sabbat*, *Faust*) and a monumental symphony. In that time the centre of his labour was the music drama: the *Hagbarth und Signe* (performed: 1882. Dresden, 1886. Budapest), the *Eliane* (performed: 1908 Budapest, 1909 Vienna). These were performed, but without gaining long term popularity.

Between 1887 and 1919 he directed the Music Academy (Budapest) with great enthusiasm and talent, for example he invited Bartók, Kodály, Weiner, Dohnányi for teaching there. Between 1887 and 1888 he changed conciously his music style, he turned towards the

“style hongrois”, and by his refreshed toolbars and new aesthetical horizon he composed his magna opus, *Toldi szerelme* (Toldi’s love, performed: 1893. Budapest). In the 1890’s he followed the absolute music genre, and composed three symphonies, which proved to be quite popular. He supported and became friends with the young Gustav Mahler– their correspondence lasted over 14 years.

In 1919 Mihalovich Ödön retired, but remained the member of the cultural elite. He had meetings with his friend: Apponyi Albert, Hubay Jenő and his young secretary Vaszy Viktor. Following his death in 1929 the Hungarian music circles organised two memorial concerts (1930, 1939).

The Double Bonding

Mihalovich’s double attachment comprises important topics of musicology and literary science, as well. He claimed to be a mediator, by which he meant conducting the naturalization of the most important musical trends of his time, that is, the reception of Liszt and Wagner in the Hungarian musical culture. While in the field of literature he played a crucial role in the musical assimilation and elaboration of the literary heritage of Arany and Lenau.

Educated in a family of double national identity Mihalovich Ödön’s aim was to create the modern Hungarian musical genre leaning on the results of the antecedents such as Erkel and Mosonyi, adopting the energizing symphonic technique of the “Neudeutsche Schule” hallmarked by Liszt and Wagner. He tried to compose music drama impressed by Wagner’s “language creating” achievements, and succeeded to compose the first Hungarian symphonic poems influenced by Liszt’s “language creating” power. While his music dramas (*Hagbarth*, *Eliane*) were not highly appreciated by the spectators, his symphonic poems (*Die Nixe*, *La Ronde du Sabbat*, *Pan’s Tod*) became the favourites of the contemporary audience.

In the creation of his own musical language Mihalovich studied Liszt’s compositions who merged various trends and among them, recurringly, the Verbunk elements as well. Thus, Mihalovich musically reverberated in parallel different layers of the texts. It is well exemplified by the peak of the *Faust-Phantasie* (1878/1880) – based on the “Zukunftsmusik” – in which a Verbunk phrase rattles in the bass register. Mihalovich’s symphonic poems through which the Hungarian literature entered into the international music world can be considered as the resonance of Liszt’s opus. However, in spite of his honour for Liszt he detached himself from Liszt’s art, by calling his symphonic poems ballads.

Mihalovich's Wagnerism is a commonplace of the Hungarian musicology based on misinterpretation. He arrived to Budapest, when the Hungarian music circles started to perform the music of Liszt's and Wagner. Thus, the young artist acquired the "Verbunk" style, the classical system of harmonies, and the "Zukunftsmusik", as well. Indeed, in the formative years of his musical identity it is not the *Bánk bán* (1861), which influenced him decisively, but the *Tannhäuser* (1862) and Wagner's concert in Pest. Between 1865 and 1870, in Leipzig and in München, Mihalovich participated at the events of the *Allgemeine Deutsche Musikverein*. Upon his return he became the founding president of the *Hungarian Wagner Society*, and chief organiser of the second Wagner-concert in Pest (1875). Wagner appreciated his efforts and offered him to compose an opera from the libretto of *Wieland, der Schmied*.

The parallel reception of Verbunk, Liszt and Wagner assured that the so called (but still non-defined) Wagnerism meant for Mihalovich not an imitative reception, as it is suggested by some contemporary critics (e.g. Péterfy Jenő), a transformative model, from which in his mature period, he composed standing on the Wagnerian tradition (see reviews by e.g. Jun. Ábrányi Emil, Csáth Géza, Siklós Albert). However, while in the music dramaturgy he followed the Wagnerian model, he did not follow the idea of "Gesamtkunstwerk" (universal artwork). From the 1880's his melody structure and instrumentation became fundamentally different from those of Wagner. In Mihalovich's scores human voice had an important action evolving role, that's why it became equal – if it is not more important – than the orchestral unisons. He applied the ballad form to the dramatic character, and from the plot he emphasised the lyrical, personal, symbolic layer. Therefore, in the same way as the Verbunk symbolised the 'Hungarianness', Wagner symbolised the path of modernity – that's why Mihalovich connected them and created from them a coherent universe of his own.

The bridge builders' role was so characteristic of him, that for the songs he chose texts of such authors, as the German-Hungarian poet Nikolaus Lenau, the Hungarian-Slovakian poet Endrődy Sándor, and the "cosmopolitan" Reviczky Gyula, who were also considered bridge-builders themselves. Mihalovich's strong identification with Lenau is well demonstrated by the fact that the in the hardest period of search for his own place, style and role (1870-1878) Mihalovich chose eleven poems by Lenau to set them into music. By using Endrődy's texts he became popular in Hungary, in the same way as by Reviczky he became popular in Germany, as well.

The Place of Hungarian Literature in the “Zukunftsmusik”

This is the first time that Mihalovich’s symphonic poems, popular in his age, are the subject of literary analysis. Mihalovich succeeded in establishing this Lisztian genre within Hungarian musical culture for an extended period. This is also the first time the Mihalovich symphonies, conducted in their day by István Kerner, Jenő Hubay and Ernő Dohnányi, became the object of literary and musicological study. Apart from their importance for musicology the analysis provided an understanding of the narrative style of Mihalovich.

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In the first period, the composer set popular verse by German poets (Lenau, Heine, Geibel) to music. He knew Hungarian literature from his childhood; however it only became the dominant vein in his output after 1887–88 due to a turn to the Hungarian style. Mihalovich was up to date with Hungarian literary circles, so his settings were composed close to the date of the poems publication, the ballad *Sellő* (Die Niexe), by Gyulai in the year of its appearing in print, his opera *Toldi* and symphonic music *Pan’s Tod* within a decade.

He shifted not only from German to Hungarian, but discovered big distances within the national literature. In the beginning, he set the poems of the late Petőfi–Arany school (of the so called: “folkish style”) into music. Thus, after a few Petőfi poems he found works by Gyulai, and a decade later, Arany’s epic. The change of horizon by the time of this choice of *Toldi szerelme* is great, because Arany’s late epic is absolutely not “folkish,” its topic, structure and language are brand new, written as symbolic descriptions. Though 46, Mihalovich was able to leave his former literary horizon, and choose a text of Reviczky, who was “the cosmopolitan” poet, an opponent of Arany. Reviczky represented the most modern trend of Hungarian literature. Mihalovich’s change of horizon—parallel to the change of his music style—presents great sensibility, open mindedness, and not least: significant talent.

Before his turn for the Hungarian style he composed two early exceptions: the *Csatadal* (Battle Song, 1872) by Petőfi and the *Sellő* (Die Nixe, 1874) by Gyulai, which became very famous and his most popular piece. Behind the great international success we can find the international topic and the original Hungarian poem, the special dramaturgy, and effective instrumentation. In a way, Mihalovich rewrote Liszt’s *Loreley* and Gyulai’s *Sellő*. This passionate piece remained on stage for the next 70 years.

While Mihalovich turned to Hungarian literature by his own initiative, he was encouraged to write a great national music drama, from Arany’s epic *Toldi* by Gustav Mahler.

Through these circumstances *Toldi* not only became the magnum opus, but also the most original music by Mihalovich: *Toldi* is the contemporary synthesis of European and Hungarian literature and music. In *Toldi* we can find the common reception of Liszt, Wagner and Erkel, a wide base from which Mihalovich could totally renew himself, so that his opera became a real new peak of the Hungarian opera history. The opera was finally performed not by Mahler, but by Arthur Nikisch, the world famous conductor whose enthusiasm was so great, that the performances of *Toldi* were still in power in 1910.

The national historic music drama was followed by a short “Kuruc” song cycle (in an imagined style of the heroic age of Prince Rákóczi, from the early 18th century), which showed that the author could use his “style hongrois” in smaller forms, such as songs. The Kuruc-songs are also a “symbiosis” of the symphonic technique and the national Verbunk genre. It is very typical of Mihalovich that—the country being in thrall of national heroism and its own great past—he composed only lyric love songs from the poem cycle of Sándor Endrődy, fully avoiding politics.

His last Hungarian literary adaptation is *Pan's Tod*, which was written in 1897. He was inspired by the music of R. Strauss and G. Mahler, a well-known poem of Reviczky Gyula, and the texts of F. Nietzsche. *Pan's Tod* is the first Hungarian Nietzsche-music, and its importance shows in the fact that the German audience accepted and loved it in 1902 Berlin.

It is Mihalovich's great musical achievement that he could homogenise the universal and the Hungarian mythical elements in his own style; whereby he could create a prolific musical link between Tristan and Toldi, or the cult of the Night (Nachtkult) and Kuruc-romanticism, as he did between Nietzsche and Reviczky. Furthermore, he gave the program symphony a brilliant twist by mixing in among allusions to Strauss, Mahler and Brahms, the strains of stylised Verbunk music.

The Setting up of the Music Institute System

In 1881 Mihalovich was appointed director of the Drama Academy, which was reorganised by him; he invented the syllabus, the exams and the talent care. In 1887 Mihalovich was made the director of Music Academy – by the former suggestion of Liszt. Due to his managing principles and practice (1887-1919) the academy was elevated among the best music schools of the world. Thanks to Mihalovich's support many of the best young composers became professors at a very young age, like Bartók, Kodály and Weiner.

The Missing Link of the Canon

The aim of this essay is to represent the correspondence of the official canon and the Mihalovich-oeuvre. The summing up the secondary literature one arrives to the conclusion, that there is not even a monograph of the author, although he was counted among the important composers till 1947 (in ten music histories edited 1891-1947). Szabolcsi Bence (1947) was the first, who ignored him – in the phantom menace of the Zdanovian directives – to defend the oeuvre of Bartók and Kodály. Only with the work of Szerző Katalin could Mihalovich resurrect and find his place if not in the mainstream, but at least at the periphery of musicology.

Mihalovich's recognition is well illustrated by the fact, that his scores were printed by the preparation of Liszt Ferenc and Richter János in 1878, 1880, and Weiner Leó in 1908. Mihalovich's pieces were played by Liszt on piano and by orchestra, as it did among the others Ernst Schuch in Dresden, Ferruccio Busoni in Berlin and Dohnányi Ernő in the studio of the Hungarian Broadcasting Company. His songs and orchestral pieces were usually performed at the regular concerts of the Allgemeine Deutsche Musikverein between 1865-1886, so *Der Geisterschiff* was premièred by Liszt in Pest and by Leopold Damrosch in Cassel, the *Faust-phantasie* was premièred by Liszt in München and by Felix Mottl in Budapest. Cosima Liszt-Wagner narrated in several letters, that she or her husband played Mihalovich's songs or symphonic poems. Later Mihalovich pieces were played on representative concerts in his country and abroad as well (e.g. 1907. Helsinki, 1910. Paris, 1911. Rome).

First time in this study we can read the concert calendar of Mihalovich, so we can know the real date of his performances. The importance of the oeuvre, which was performed at 150 concerts between 1865 and 1940, should be remediated. Living in the secondary modernity – after the canon deconstruction of the postmodernism – the musicology could bridge a big gap – even in literature – taking Mihalovich onto his well deserved place.

The chosen authors of Mihalovich are still among the most important representatives of the Hungarian literature. Arany's *Toldi* is a required reading, Reviczky's *Pán* is still in the curriculum – and the dropout of Endrődy, or Gyulai is not attributed to their lack of talent either. Could audience remember Jókai's *Cigánybáró* without the music of Jr. Johann Strauss? Could we know Goethe's *Egmont* play without the music of Beethoven? Could

someone read Balázs Béla's *Wooden prince* without the music of Bartók? As we can see, music often supervised the literary canon. Thus, it could be a big cultural victory if the hidden opus of Endrődy, Gyulai and Reviczky could be resurrected by Mihalovich's one time meritedly popular oeuvre.

Records and concert of Mihalovich's oeuvre by Ákos Windhager

- ***Eliane 1. prelude*** - instrumentation of Windhager Ákos
14. 15. 2005 Marble room of the Hungarian Broadcast - Vántus Brass quintet
06. 03. 2006 Szeged, Fricsay-room, Vántus Brass quintet
- ***Eliane 2. prelude*** – instrumentation of Várda Zsófia
14. 15. 2005 Marble room of the Hungarian Broadcast – Holy Hubert Horn quartet
- ***Epithalame for the wedding ceremony of Paola Borghese***
15. 01. 2005 Museum of Liszt Ferenc (Budapest), Weisenfeld Melinda and Király Miklós – piano
14. 15. 2005 Marble room of the Hungarian Broadcast, Takács Judit and Király Miklós – piano
- ***Faust, Nr.1.*** – piano quartet,
15. 01. 2005 Museum of Liszt Ferenc (Budapest), Vaszy piano quartet
14. 15. 2005 Marble room of the Hungarian Broadcast, Vaszy piano quartet
- ***Marcia funebre sulla morte dell' Imperatrice Regine Elisabetta d' Austria-Ungheria***
(3rd part of the IIIrd symphony) – instrumentation of the author
October 2005., N.6. Studio of Hungarian Broadcast, Magyar Éva and Király Miklós – piano
- ***Historical songs (Kuruc-dalok)***
14. 15. 2005 Marble room of the Hungarian Broadcast, Geszthy Veronika – soprano, Király Miklós – piano
October 2005., N. 6. Studio of Hungarian Broadcast, Geszthy Veronika – soprano, Király Miklós – piano
- ***Der Tod des Pan*** – instrumentation of the author
20. 02. 2007Hungarian Catholic Radio, Éliás Katalin and Varga Petra – piano
06.04. 2007 Nyitott Műhely (alternative cultural centre): Éliás Katalin and Varga Petra – piano
- ***Toldi - prelude***
14. 15. 2005 Marble room of the Hungarian Broadcast – instrumentation of Juhász Dániel, Vantus pano quintet
10. 05. 2006Hungarian Catholic Radio – instrumentation of Bethlenfalvy Bálint

Várda Zsófia – horn, Radics Mihály – violin, Király Miklós – piano

Instrumentation of Windhager Ákos, Symphony Orchestra “Holy Elisabeth“,
conducted: Bartal László

21. 09. 2008 Budapest, Church of Holy Elisabeth on the square of Rózsák,

18. 10. 2008 Székesfehérvár, Church of Holy John of Nepomuk

05.11. 2008 Matthias-church

13. 12. 2008 Dunakeszi, High school “Radnóti Miklós”

- ***Festklänge (Ünnepi hangok)*** (4th part of the IIIrd symphony) – instrumentation of the author
October 2005., N.6. Studio of Hungarian Broadcast, Magyar Éva and Király Miklós – piano
- ***Funeral music for Deák (Gyászzené Deák Ferenc emlékére)*** – instrumentation of the author
15. 01. 2005 Museum of Liszt Ferenc (Budapest), Weisenfeld Melinda and Király Miklós – piano
- ***Die Nixe*** – symphonic poem,
Symphony Orchestra “Vántus István”, conducted by Somorjai Péter
06. 03. 2006 Szeged, Fricsay-room

Papers of dissertation

- 2009 „Can an immortal resurrect? - Mihalovich oeuvre at the breaking point of musical canons”) – Conference of „Theorizing the Space Between”, Alberta University, Edmonton, Canada
- 2007 “*Toldi in the romantic music*” / ”Toldi a romantikus zeneirodalomban” – conferences of PhD-students of Eötvös Lóránd University
- 2005 “*The topic of Faust and the mermaid in the Mihalovich-oeuvre*” / „Faust és Sellő motívumok Mihalovich életművében” – Conference of the Hungarian Musicology Institute for the honour of Sárosi Bálint

Publication of the dissertation

- 2006/2007 “*The rarity of the Saloon of Pest: the Mihalovich-oeuvre*” (A Pesti szalon ritkaságai: a Mihalovich-életmű) = monthly program of the Hungarian Catholic Radio, edited by Bartha Katalin.