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**Brass chamber music of
András Szöllősy**

DLA dissertation thesis

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Research topic

The topic of my dissertation is the brass chamber music of András Szöllősy, who was one of the most outstanding composers of the post-Bartók era. Those musicologists who examined his oeuvre did not pay much attention to a segment that contains 4 compositions: *Musiche per ottoni*, *A Hundred Bars for Tom Everett*, *Suoni di tromba*, and *Quartetto di tromboni*. The most important aspect of my study is the analysis of these four compositions, their role in Szöllősy's oeuvre, the origin of these compositions and their effects. My dissertation is analytical in nature, and deals with the historical background as well. Due to this, I decided to leave out the analysis of the semantics of the discussed works. From my point of view, the brass chamber pieces and the analysis of Szöllősy's music in general (considering metaphysical, aesthetical, and spiritual aspects) are worth an independent dissertation. In my dissertation, I do not have any intention to use the concepts and notions of performance art or music theory, therefore my aim is to give a precise picture about the analyzed chamber pieces. I focused on demonstrating those points of views, that connect the results of the analysis of the compositions (including tune, harmonies, and rhythm, and form) to the historical background. These four ways of the analysis gave an understandable description of this particular segment of the composer's works. It also could serve as a topic of discussion for musicologists.

Process and methodology

The logical structure of the dissertation is based on two main points: analysis of the compositions and the historical background.

1. Analysis: In all of the four compositions I examined the serial patterns of music. The description of the rows of the works mentioned above is based on the identification of the various distance models, repeating intervals and chords. I found it important to highlight the presence of tonality. (For example: chords, tonal centers, diatonic scale, and other tonal attributes) Beside this, I presented the structures and the formal patterns of the works, the description of the melody and chords, as well. I borrowed some of my methodology from those musicologists who examined the music of Béla Bartók. I find it significant to mention the axis system of Ernő Lendvai. I discovered through analysis, that the brass chamber pieces have a matchless sonority and structural construction, which I compared and interpreted to the other chamber and orchestral compositions of the oeuvre. The analysis of the rows both in the main text and appendixes were created the "MuseScore" application. We often found tone rows in

the works of Szöllősy, sometimes many of them. In order to make things visually more clear, I labelled them with different colors.

2. *Historical background:* I approached the chamber pieces based upon the performer the person commissioning the work, and the dedication. During my research I found that the most influential musicological works of Szöllősy are his dissertation, titled *The art of Kodály* and a monograph, titled *Honegger*. In my opinion these works provide great help in giving us insight about his attitude towards music theory. It is very important to mention the relationship with the various composers from different musical eras, particularly considering the effects and parallel features, especially when it comes to the analysis of the archaic movements of *Musiche per ottoni*. I searched for unpublished Szöllősy works in the National Széchényi Library, and I also visited the Hungarian Radio Archives, and the Archives for 20th-21st Century Hungarian Music in the Research Center for Humanities Institute for Musicology. My dissertation gives new information and references, due to its quotes from Szöllősy's correspondence, which can be found in the Library of the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music. These letters written by the composer give us an honest picture about his attitude towards the contemporary music era and his own art, as well. During my research the following web pages and their database helped me significantly: www.muzeum.hu (unfortunately, it is no longer available) and www.arcanum.hu, which ensured quick access for credible bibliography. I was able to speak with the artists who deserve credit for making these four pieces popular in Hungary and abroad. The examining of general brass chamber music life of this era is not among the goals of my dissertation. There are several other studies discussing that topic. However, related explanation can be found in my footnotes, if it is needed should the need arise for proper understanding of the main text. If we consider the origin of Szöllősy's works and those of contemporary composer colleagues, we are able to locate some parallel musical features. For example, a chamber piece by Frigyes Hidas, titled *Fantasy for trumpet and piano*, composed for the International Trumpet Competition of 1984, just like Szöllősy's *Souni di tromba*. Moreover, Hidas's *Fantasy for bass trombone* and Szöllősy's *A Hundred Bars for Tom Everett* were written for the request of the same customer, named Tom Everett, at the very same time. It is an interesting fact that *Quartetto di tromboni* and István Márta's work titled ... *per quattro tromboni* both won prizes in 1987, in a competition named "New Hungarian Music on the radio". The former won the Critic's Choice Award while the latter won the Public's Choice Award. Important connection points can be identified between Ligeti: *Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano* and *Suoni di Tromba*.

As for the afterlife of the works, we can say that *A Hundred Bars for Tom Everett* has more significant history. This composition is still very popular in the United States of America, and has been recorded many times, last time in 2014 by Justin Clark.

In my dissertation, in addition to the works mentioned in the title, I would also like to add the mixed chamber music, where the composer uses one or two brass instruments. These are the *Elegia*, *Kolozsvári éjjel (Kolozsvár at night)*, and *Pro Somno Igoris Stravinsky quieto*. These pieces are analyzed rather well in the available studies, so I did not write about them in great detail here, besides mentioning them to highlight the importance of the brass instruments.

Results and assertions

My aim was to provide some insights about the four compositions, especially regarding their structural development, and I believe that my study can help artists and students who consider performing these pieces later. Being familiar with the structure of these works can support not only the performance, but the understanding and reception of the music as well. My belief – supported by the findings of my dissertation – is, that the value of the brass chamber music is equal to the other works of Szöllősy’s oeuvre. His compositions are based on a complex, logical structure, that can be compared to other significant works composed for different musical instruments. The structure of Szöllősy’s pieces are traceable back to Bartók’s bridge form, relations between the chords that can be depicted on the axis system and distance models can be found in the rows of the compositions regularly. The way Szöllősy uses dodecaphony is outstanding and unique and can be seen in his brass chamber pieces. Most of the movements of *Musiche per ottoni* and *A Hundred Bars for Tom Everett* have several tone rows, so I defined them as themes in this study. The *Quartetto di tromboni* has only one basic row, so I used the expression, “row” in the analysis of tone rows.

The uniqueness of Szöllősy’s dodecaphony

In many cases, the rows appear as themes or tunes/melodies in the compositions and sometimes several different rows can be observed. An excellent example for this phenomenon can be found in *Musiche per ottoni*, where each part has its own twelve-tone system, or another one in *A Hundred Bars for Tom Everett* where we can see several dodecaphonic themes with several

tone systems. This is quite outstanding, because the genre itself is monothematic. He does not use rows as chords except in the first movement of *Quartetto di tromboni*.

Transpositions: Placing the row into different pitches is a special process in the art of Szöllősy. This method can be easily identified in the second movement of *Quartetto di tromboni*, as well as in some parts of *A Hundred Bars for Tom Everett*, and also in *Musiche per ottoni*. These transpositions are traceable back to the functional tone system (fifth, fourth intervals) and the axis system, related to Bartók's works, (for example: tritones).

Transformations: The serialism used in Szöllősy's brass chamber works does not wish to present all of the transformations of one particular row as a primary purpose. A row often appears as a basic row. The only composition where we can see every type of transformation is *A Hundred Bars for Tom Everett*.

In the *Musiche per ottoni* we cannot find many transformations, except in the movements titled Specchio, Canone I. and Riflesso, where inversion translations can be seen, or in the Corale I. and Intrada II., where retrograde translations appear.

Additional unique structural solutions in rows: Another unique process in Szöllősy's works is the switching of the tones of the row. For example, as he uses this technique in *A Hundred Bars for Tom Everett*. He starts the row, then he restarts it with adding a new tone to it, then restarts it again, until he reaches the 12th tone. Another great example for this is the second section of *A Hundred Bars for Tom Everett*, or also the first movement of *Quartetto di tromboni*.

The forms of the compositions: It is widespread in literature that Szöllősy's works have a special inward form, that can be seen in the brass chamber pieces. In all of the four compositions I mentioned before, the closed musical phrases are segregated well. In *A Hundred Bars for Tom Everett* and the first movement of *Quartetto di tromboni* we can examine the unique use of the bridge form of Bartók. Most of the short movements of *Musiche per ottoni* were composed in small ternary forms, while some other movements have stanzaic features. In addition, in some movements we can see some structural imitation, too. In the second movement of *Quartetto di tromboni* we can discover stanzaic structural development, which consists volta rhythm patterns.

The ongoing performance activities of these works are strongly related to my research. Currently, we are celebrating Szöllősy's 100th birthday and organizing an international and Hungarian concert tour, named RÉZ(k)ARCOK Szöllősy100 to honor his legacy. After the concerts we are planning to record the four compositions on CD. The results of this dissertation will be attached to the disks' descriptions and we are also planning to give lectures on the topic at brass music events, such as the VI. Trombone Days in Békéscsaba.

The newness of this dissertation and its place in literature: The uniqueness of this dissertation is being the first attempt of analysis of these four compositions. The theoretic experts who examined the oeuvre of Szöllősy did not yet deal with this part of his art before. In my opinion, the written literature is incomplete not only concerning these four particular compositions, but generally about the brass chamber pieces, including their analysis, reviews, and other publications. Without reliable academic sources we are not able to start academic discussions, therefore composers may not have any inspiration or encouragement to write new pieces. My goal is, that my dissertation will inspire students and musicians to study and analyze more works from the 20th century, and also from the contemporary era. I hope that the forthcoming new studies and publications will be available for master classes, summer schools and for other professional debates where the composer, the performer and the audience can have mutual discussions about the importance of these brass chamber works.