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The development of composer Kamilló Lendvay's
style in his early compositions for violin
Fantasy, Rhapsody, and the Adaptations of Rhapsody

Theses of the DLA doctoral dissertation

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I. The antecedents of this research project

I had the exceptional honor of being able to refine the interpretation of Kamilló Lendvay's *Rhapsody* and *Violin Concerto No. 1* through personal consultation with the composer. The much-anticipated collaboration reinforced the direction of my interpretation, and I had the privilege to experience the elderly composer's open mindedness and thirst for discovery. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that this experience of a lifetime prompted me to choose Kamilló Lendvay's violin works as the topic of my dissertation.

Published literature about Lendvay's life and work is scant. There is only one larger academic study documenting his work for future generations: Márta Sz. Farkas' short monograph in the series *Hungarian Composers* edited by Melinda Berlász.¹ Articles and studies have been published in the journals *Parlando* and *Muzsika*, and in some online publications,² showing a significant gap in the field of music history and the need for further research.

II. Research questions and objectives

My original plan to focus my dissertation on Lendvay's major violin works changed significantly, as I unexpectedly came across previously unpublished and not widely known works during the research process. One of them is *Fantasy* for violin and piano from 1951, the other one is *Double Concerto* for violin and cimbalom from 1991. The latter is actually the second adaption of the iconic 1955 work *Rhapsody* for violin and piano, using a string orchestra accompaniment. I intended to give a central role to these previously unknown works in my writing, so the focus eventually fell on the two pieces composed for violin and piano: *Fantasy* and *Rhapsody*, and the comparative analysis of the adaptations of *Rhapsody*.

The purpose of my project is to create an overview of this composer's works for violin, to place them in the context of his compositions for string instruments, to outline his individual compositional style, and ultimately, to inspire other performing

¹ Sz. Farkas, Márta, "Kamilló Lendvay," in *Hungarian composers*, ed. Melinda Berlász, 16 (Budapest: Mágus Kiadó, 2001)

² The music education journal of the Union of Hungarian Musicians and Dancers and Hungary's leading monthly music journal since 1957.

artists, musicologists, music teachers, and music listeners to become acquainted with the works of Kamilló Lendvay.

III. Sources and research methods

Kamilló Lendvay's estate has been in the collection of the Archives for 20th–21st Century Hungarian Music of the Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute for Musicology since 2018. I have conducted a thorough review of the collection and selected manuscripts, published scores, and audio recordings relevant to the topic of my dissertation. After obtaining the approval of the copyright holder, Judit Lendvay, a large amount of research material came into my possession, in addition to the original scores previously received as a gift from Kamilló Lendvay.

First, I organized the compositions, then compared the data in the manuscripts with the information listed in the press and published scores, and with the catalogue compiled by Márta Sz. Farkas. I came across several discrepancies that required further investigation to clarify. I searched for information about the background of the pieces at Bartók Radio, the Budapest Music Center Hungarian Music Information Center and Library, the Óbudai Társaskör Archive, and the ELTE Eötvös Art Ensemble Archive. I have coordinated with the staff at the Hire Library of Editio Musica Budapest and at Akkord Music Publishing regarding the data on the sheet music. I have collected articles, studies, and other printed literature related to the topic. I made the Lendvay-recordings available to the public on YouTube, organized into playlists.³ I contacted the artists who previously performed the violin compositions: Christian Ostertag, Ildikó Fazekas – Ágnes Szakály, Bence Gazda – Rózsa Farkas, Eszter Perényi, and Vilmos Szabadi. I regularly consulted with Judit Lendvay, who graciously helped me find answers to all my questions. I have compiled the finalized data into a table found in Chapter II.2 of the dissertation.

After listening to the music recordings and the related radio interviews, I started the process of analyzing the works. I examined the compositions from the perspectives

³ <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBEFqeqFluamPwmAkD6-gdrKm-8cy10r1&si=HvUHPM9XFcWrMdC3> (Last accessed: May 14, 2024.)
Compositions for strings:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBEFqeqFluanj5i4b87Ykp9RXRIzOBUyG> (Last accessed: May 14, 2024)

of form, technique, structure, and stagecraft, and I described their sound, expression, and overall style. My goals included mapping out the influences felt in the works, some of which are inspirations documented by the composer, while some are assumed by the recipient as a performer or as a listener.

IV. Results and conclusions

Kamilló Lendvay composed his two pieces for violin and piano at a very young age: *Fantasy*, which was later unjustly forgotten, was written in 1951, and a few years later the highly popular *Rhapsody* was born in 1955. The detailed analysis of these pieces is included in Chapter III of the thesis. My analyses rest on the criteria formulated by the composer himself: the unity of melody, harmony, and rhythm.⁴ Based on these criteria, I conducted a complete harmonic analysis of the works, and I outlined the formal structure of the pieces, taking into account the devices of melodic shaping and the characteristics of rhythmic elements.

In the case of *Fantasy*, I considered in-depth analysis to be particularly important, as correct interpretation - especially in the case of an unknown composition - has an impact on the quality of the performance. I examined the large units of the piece by breaking them down into their smallest elements, elaborated on my observations in detail, and summarized the results in tables. My goal was to draw up a clear structure from the meandering themes of the improvisational music piece.

In the case of *Rhapsody*, finding the analysis that I originally attributed to Lendvay, but turned out to be a work of András Borgulya, is a significant research result.⁵ Since Borgulya's study covers harmonic, formal, and compositional principles, in my analysis of the *Rhapsody* I intended to give special emphasis to the performer's perspective.

I selected digital transfer recordings from the author's private cassette tapes for the purpose of studying the different performance styles of the themes.⁶ I was primarily

⁴ Quoting from Kamilló Lendvay's autobiography: <https://www.kamillolendvay.hu/en/biography.html> (Last accessed: May 14, 2024).

⁵ András Borgulya, *Lendvay Kamilló: Rapszódia per violino e pianoforte*. Budapest, 1989. Manuscript. HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute for Musicology, Archives for 20th–21st Century Hungarian Music, Lendvay Collection. Without call number.

⁶ Kamilló Lendvay, *Rhapsody*. Digital audio recording. HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute for Musicology, Archives for 20th–21st Century Hungarian Music, Lendvay Collection.

looking for an answer to what effect rhythmic variability has on interpretation, and then I associated my own interpretation of the piece with my observations. I noticed as a striking characteristic that the varying rhythms in Lendvay's music do not only serve to make the music more colourful, but also indicate specific instructions regarding articulation and character.

Lendvay Kamilló's *Rhapsody* is such an emblematic work that not only occupied the author at the beginning of his career, but he also returned to it several times later to rework it. 25 years later, he created an adaptation with a string orchestra accompaniment, and then 36 years later he rewrote it for violin, cimbalom and string orchestra under the title *Double Concerto*. The analysis of the two adaptations is discussed in Chapter IV of the dissertation.

Since the violin solo is identical to the original solo of the piece, the focus of the analysis of the 1980 adaptation with string orchestra was on comparing the orchestra accompaniment and the piano part. The primary difference arising from the sounds created by the accompaniments is the soft, flowing sound of the string orchestra, which contrasts with the distinctively articulated, sometimes percussive sound of the piano in the original piece, and which I highlighted as the new version's central feature. I have investigated how the musical material of the accompaniment has been adapted, and then I examined the differences in tempo.

Upon seeing the first lines of the *Double Concerto*, I realized that it starts with the theme of *Rhapsody*, and after flipping through the sheet music it became clear that this 1991 composition is a direct adaptation of the 1955 *Rhapsody* for violin and piano. Although the complete material of the original violin solo can be traced throughout, it nevertheless undergoes a series of modifications. I have mapped out how the solo part was distributed between the two instrument players and what differences characterize them. I compared the string orchestra accompaniment with the accompaniment of the first adaptation of *Rhapsody*, and then highlighted some essential aspects regarding the adaptation, such as the use of a thicker texture, the question of granting equal importance to the two soloists, capturing the possibilities that arise from the very different sounds of the two instruments, while also bringing them closer to each other.

LK_Dig_00288. Performers: Eszter Perényi (violin), Ádám Fellegi (piano); LK_Dig_00324. Performers: Ferenc Szecsődi (violin), Anna Lugossy (piano).

Thanks to Lendvay's sharp precision that inspired unceasing development, his early *Rhapsody* accompanied him for decades throughout his career, until even its smallest details became clarified.

The diversity of his style stems from his deep familiarity with various musical genres, his proficiency with the properties of the musical instruments, and the various inspirations he had encountered. In *Fantasy*, there is indeed a reference to Kodály, but the "instinctive inspiration" confessed in connection with *Rhapsody*⁷ can be attributed to the imprint of the influence of Bartók, most evident in Lendvay's works from the 1950s and early 1960s. However, the seeds of the composer's individual style are already present in the early violin pieces, and are based on the tradition in its respect for the essential role of melody, its choice of classical forms and genres, and the pursuit of tonality. The composer's unique individual style is characterized by seamlessly incorporating jazz elements into the world of classical music. The composer's inventiveness is evident in the way he showcases rhythm and an extremely diverse range of expression in even a short theme. Lendvay's creativity and thoughtfulness is impressive as a performing artist and as audience.

I hope that my research will inspire others to study the art of Kamilló Lendvay, whose knowledge as a composer and whose humanity destined him to be a role model and an inspiring source for future generations, even after his death.

V. Documentation of activities related to the subject of the thesis

As a result of joint consultations with Kamilló Lendvay, *Rhapsody* was performed on October 30, 2012 at the Bálint Sándor Community Center in Szeged, and again on November 11, 2012 in the Bartók Auditorium of the Institute for Musicology in Budapest.⁸ At the composer's request, we introduced the work together and shared the process of preparation with the audience.

In the spring of 2013, we worked on refining *Violin Concerto No. 1*. The first movement was performed on April 3, 2013, at the Kroó György School of Music and

⁷ In Kamilló Lendvay's own words: <https://www.kamillolendvay.hu/en/biography.html> (Last accessed: May 14, 2024)

⁸ Guest performer, piano: György Klebiczki.
The recording of the concert is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pugOeSkdW0Q> (Last accessed: May 14, 2024)

Visual Arts in Budapest, and on April 21, 2013, in the Bartók Auditorium of the Institute for Musicology.⁹ The entire concerto was performed on May 13, 2013 at the Bernát Menner Music School in Tata, followed by a performance on May 29, 2013 at the Bálint Sándor Cultural House in Szeged.¹⁰

During my doctoral studies, on April 24, 2023, I gave a presentation titled *Music Lesson with Live Music* in the Heart of Jesus Church in Vecsés for the high school students of Sándor Petőfi Roman Catholic Elementary School and High School, where we performed Lendvay's *24 Duos*, along with a presentation.¹¹

On May 19, 2023, the violin duets and violin-piano compositions of Kamilló Lendvay were performed at the *Holiday Concert* held at the Bernát Menner Music School in Tata. The evening was opened by the violin students and teachers of the school with a performance of *12 Violin Duos* written for children, and then I performed *24 Duos* with my partner.¹² In the second half of the evening, the composition *Fantasy* was performed again on stage after nearly 70 years of being forgotten, and the popular *Rhapsody* closed the event.¹³ I introduced the compositions with a presentation before the performances.

The *Memorial Concert* held on the occasion of the 95th anniversary of Lendvay's birth on January 7, 2024 at the Nádor Auditorium in Budapest¹⁴ also placed great emphasis on the presentation that accompanied the performance. The concert was reported by the journal *Papageno*,¹⁵ and an interview was given to Bartók Radio.

In August 2023 and 2024, I gave presentations about my research on Lendvay's work at the closing conferences of the New National Excellence Program.

On November 9, 2024, we gave a concert titled *Hungarian Musical Overview from the First Half of the 20th Century* with Gabriella Gyökér at the Chamber Hall of

⁹ Guest performer, piano: Gayane Jaghatspanyan.

¹⁰ Guest performer, piano: György Klebiczki.

¹¹ Guest performer, violin: Szilvia Szigeti.

¹² Guest performer, violin: Szilvia Szigeti.

¹³ Guest performer, piano: Gabriella Gyökér.

¹⁴ Guest performers: Szilvia Szigeti on violin, Gabriella Gyökér on piano.

The recording of the concert is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R58GxByr5N8>. (Last accessed: May 14, 2024)

¹⁵ <https://papageno.hu/promocio/2023/12/szuletesenek-95-evfordulojan-koncerttel-emlekeznek-lendvay-kamillora/> (Last accessed: May 14, 2024)

the Old Academy of Music, where compositions from Hungarian history of music were performed, including Lendvay's violin-piano compositions.¹⁶

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¹⁶ https://lisztmuseum.hu/programok_muzeum/2024-11-09-nagy-ivett-es-gyoker-gabriella-chamber-music-concert-12889 (Last accessed: 26 November 2024).

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