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THE IMAGINATIVE ROLE OF THE VIOLONCELLO IN RICHARD STRAUSS' SYMPHONIC
POEMS

THESIS FOR DLA

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1.: The Antecedents of the Research

The composer at issue came into my consideration in 2001 when – for the first time in my life – I participated as a soloist in the performing of his significant symphonic poem. (Don Quixote) Then several symphonic poems followed that in line, furthermore I could become acquainted with more of the composer's chamber music pieces as well. As a violoncellist of the operahouse I play recent Strauss operas in the orchestra from time to time so I could get insights into a major part of his life-work.

Music and visual thinking, illustrative parts – all are unknown, inanimated abstractions in the case of we do not become immersed in historical occurrences of the programmusic and the symphonic poems. Speaking about musical imagination we tend to set out the analyses in the music of the 19th century, to think of the sonority of the romantic orchestra. Although several composers in the earlier centuries tried to improve and insert more in comparison with the mere musical content. Antonio Vivaldi's violin concerto cycle entitled The Four Seasons has plenty of musical pictures. It is a violin concerto cycle with the accompaniment of string-orchestra written for a soloist violin, a wind or any kind of special instruments cannot be found, but the composition is perfect which is provided by short instructions to every movement by the writer. In some works of Ludwig van Beethoven we can find undertitles (Moonlight, Storm, Appassionata, Eroica, Pathetique), which intensify the significance of the representation out of music.

The formation of the genre of the tone poem can be attached to overtures of Ludwig van Beethoven. Franz Liszt confirms that when he assigns the overture as the ancestor of the program-music. The overture of the opera – which originally was the foremusic of the plotful opera – it was often staged, vivified on its own, what is more it survived the certain opera numbers of times. After that it was only a step to match these pieces a subject and entitle them in order to let the genre of the symphonic poem bloom very slowly.

2.: The structure of the thesis:

The introduction raises the problem that there is the desire in all of us for discovering the content beyond the music. In the line of Strauss-parsings I intend my essay to a new one, which studies the role of the violoncello in the symphonic imaging. The music turns to the listener's creative fantasy, tries to wake up those feelings and immaginations where that arises

from. Following this leading idea I am trying to analyse the symphonic poems of Richard Strauss in a violoncellist aspect. A new projection of analysing symphonic poems can be born by this means. It was Hector Berlioz, who laid down the bases of the romantic tone poem when he wrote his *Symphonie fantastique* in 1830. Here the leading idea throughout the movements was applied for the first time in the world by a composer. This is the opus which is the pointing departure of the history of the genre, although in other works of the composer he could not unify the symphonic poem's genre compass, to work out the units in form were left to Berlioz's friend and admirer, Franz Liszt. Beyond the followers of the German Liszt-Wagner school the most diverse national romantic tendencies belong to the exponents of the genre who brought the fancy colours of the folktales, legends beside of the mythological and historical, to mention only a few: Smetana: *Richard III* (1858), *My Homeland*, P.I. Tchaikovsky: *Romeo and Juliet* (1870), Camille Saint-Saens: *Danse Macabre* (1875), Antonin Dvorák: *The Noon Witch*, *A Hero's Song* (1897) C. Franck: *The Accursed Huntsman* (1882).

Works from the analysis section

R. Strauss's symphonic poems were born in a time of a continuous and intensive work with significant German orchestras through more than a decade, their world premier in order of time: 1886: *Aus Italien* Op.16. , 1888: *Don Juan* Op.20., 1890: *Death and Transfiguration* Op. 24., 1890: *Macbeth* Op. 23., 1895: *Till Eulenspiegel* Op.28. , 1896: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Op. 30. , 1898: *Don Quixote* Op.35., 1899: *A Hero's Life* Op.40. 1903: *Sinfonia Domestica* Op. 53., 1915: *Eine Alpensinfonie* Op. 64.

In my essay it is important for me to take a detour about a fact that the violoncello's features had been changed to reach of the sound of the big orchestras (Here I am thinking of the orchestra sound used in the turn of the century by Strauss, eventually with triple woodwinds or eight horns.). The gut strings were changed for the bigger sounded metal strings, the leaning of the neck angles smaller with the front board, that results a bigger sound as well. In the entire life of Strauss significant compositions were born from the pens of contemporary writers for modern violoncello are the following: I start the list with the violoncello-piano sonata of the composer under review (*Romanze in F major for cello and piano*, op.6, 1883, premier: 1890). Strauss did not call this three movement opus as his most cherish one but there is no doubt in this sonata the stricks of genius appeared meanwhile the young composer was trying his wings.

The double concerto (a-moll Op.102) of Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) has the difficulty of a violoncello concerto but likewise Brahms sets a challenging task in his violoncello-piano sonatas (e-moll Op.38, F-dúr Op.99). In his piano trios and quartets as well as in his string quartets the violoncello has also a soloist role.

At the same time with Strauss's Alpine Symphony in 1915 Claude Debussy (1862-1918) composes his violoncello-piano sonata and one of the pearls of the string quartets literature – which is his only one – he writes it earlier, in 1893.

Antonin Dvořák's violoncello concerto is a contemporary of Strauss as the composer and performer of the opus. The piece is one of the most often played violoncello concerto which regularly appears as requirements of concert programmes and auditions. Besides the g-moll Rondo (Op.94) and the Waldesruhe (Op.68) are present in the repertoire of a practising violoncellist. Dvořák's piano trios just as his string quartets with the violoncello's exposed solos take a very significant place on the music hall programmes.

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)'s solo sonata for violoncello (Op.25.No.3) and his violoncello-piano sonata (Op.11 No.3) are outstanding pieces of the 20th century's violoncello literature.

Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967)'s solosonata in three movements (Op. 8., scordatura: A, D, Fis, H) and his Op.4. violoncello-piano sonata are equally the pillars of the 20th century's repertoire.

Hans Pfitzner (1869-1949): violoncello-piano sonata Op.1.

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971): *Suite italienne* (1932. transcription of Gregor Piatigorsky)

Anton Webern (1883-1945): *Three Little Pieces* for cello and piano (Op.11)

3.: Method

In order to expand the topic there were informations on the pieces' scores and the available literature. In the scores eventually the writer himself comments to the piece. Paying regard to the composer does not use the violoncello with equal emphasis in all of his tone poems so there are works I will treat more.

In the works of Richard Strauss I am analyzing the motivic musical building can be caught out which specifies Wagner (every phrase has a magnitude to show the tune), however a significant difference can be noticed regarding the length of the theme. In almost every case Strauss works with quite short themes, fills the score as a mosaic while the parallel thinking resides in – the Till Eulenspiegel is a great leap forward in this aspect – namely the parallel phrases running together can give a dissonant sound meanwhile we are hearing two or more coordinate tone. This linear thinking is a typical feature of the modern music, for instance we can see that in Hindemith's music.

Studying the tone poems of Richard Strauss I can report the writer use the violoncello as a solo instrument on the one hand tracking Wagner and other opera composers (the segmented violoncello phrases can be found even in the first act of Siegfried as in the Lohengrin or in the Parsifal) and on the other hand at the parts decreased to a chamber orchestra. The chronological order of the symphonic poems are almost analogous the order how Strauss assigns more and more complicated and important tasks for the violoncello. Due to the high vocal range the instrument is as appropriate to strengthen the foundations for both the double bass as a viola soloist in the register of reaching manifestations become a competitor of the violin. In my thesis, although not discussed Strauss, but as a musician playing operas note that for example, the first act of Rosenkavalier (as in the first scene Arabella) can be found on cello trio, or the about 45-minute-part in the Ariadne auf Naxos requiring a chamber music is the accomplishment of the chipped instrumentation engineering in the composer's symphonic poems. In terms of aus Italien regarded as a cornerstone for the use of string-based rhetoric, the string sound becomes more unique owing to the richer, but chamber music effect. Similar, but Strauss directs the chamber music to a different level of understanding, when he uses the violin cello as a soloist partner of the violin and viola (such as Death and Transfiguration, Alpine Symphony).

Clearly the greatest challenge to meet the Don Quixote musical and technical requirements of the cello and players. We do not know why Strauss did not compose a concerto for cello as for example with Hanus Wihan, the violon cellist had a personal relationship, perhaps he intends to fill a need that in the Don Quixote the cello has such a prominent role. They perform the piece with invited soloists (+ viola soloist) during concerts.